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A WEEKLY

PUBLICATION.

ADAPTED TO THE BEST CURRENT & STANDARD LITERATURE.

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IRENE, OR THE LONELY MANOR.

BY

CARL DETLEF.

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I R E N E, OR THE LONELY MANOR.

“Where are your thoughts, Carl Ivanovitsch? You are perfectly silent.”

“The result of past terrors and exertions—I have nerves, my dear fellow, though you may not yet be aware of it.”

“You are the strangest mortal under the sun. You’ll attack a bear with only a knife, never lose your coolness in times of peril, and yet shriek at the sight of a leech like a timid girl.”

“I hate surprises. If you had told me that your confounded sluggish Steppe rivers contained thousands of leeches, that rushed greedily at bare legs, I should have made my preparations accordingly and not laid aside, in order to take these shy water fowl by surprise, garments which throughout cultivated Europe, with the exception

of the Scotch Highlands, are considered necessary articles of clothing."

"Then you won't go duck shooting to-morrow?"

"At any rate only in a boat. You won't get me into that labyrinth of reeds, marshy water, snakes, and vermin again."

"Are you tired?"

"As a dray horse. This has been a hard day. It began cheerfully by the worthy Vania's pouring a pail of ice water over my body, upon which you tipped a cup of hot tea down my throat. Frozen without and scorched within, I started upon this hunting party, upon which the sun soon sent down his burning rays. We tramped and waded about twelve mortal hours. I feel utterly worn out, so exhausted mentally and physically, that I am indifferent even to the magic of this summer night—Vania, if there is such a thing as a pillow among the late aunt's effects, push it under my curly head, the outlines of this wooden arm are becoming quite too indelibly impressed on my skull—oh! wondrous, profound silence—do you know that poem, Alexander? Oh! no, you despise German poetry. Never mind, I can remember only the first words, but I'll hum the tune—"

"Thanks, Vania, that pillow just suits my back. God will repay you in the other world, as my uncle used to say when any one did him a service, and this prospective reward relieved him from the inconvenience of giving a fee."

I had taken my friend, Alexander Gregorovitsch, by surprise the night before. The idea had occurred to me very suddenly, probably caused by the terrible dullness and hot dusty air, which brooded like a leaden cloud over St. Petersburg. Alexander had told me that in midsummer he should go to an out of the way estate, south-east of Moscow, which he had inherited a short time before from an aged aunt, who had lived there in the deepest seclusion. It was a friend's duty to ascertain whether the inheritance was of any value ; so I set out and reached his house without giving him any intimation of my intention.

The plain, unpretending mansion, evidently built in the previous century, and whose thick, brown, wooden walls afforded a comfortable protection from the severest cold, every where revealed traces of an old maid's life. On the faded silk damask coverings of the furniture lay crocheted tidies, gay embroideries were devoted to the strangest uses, for instance, a *spittoon* was surrounded with a border of faded forget-me-nots, cushions, bell ropes, lamp mats, and towel-racks abounded ; porcelain vases with bouquets of artificial flowers stood under glass cases, embroidered pictures, in which beads represented the eyes and a few stitches of scarlet wool the mouth, hung framed on the walls, while work and key baskets could be counted by dozens. The library, which was contained on the shelves of a small *étàgere*, consisted of the works of Florian, Télémaque, Paul et Virginie, a prayer-

book and cook-book; the latter must have been often used and the owner had noted her own culinary experiences in delicate writing on the margin of the pages. Between the leaves were book-marks bearing sentimental devices: a heart pierced by an arrow covered the recipe for a *supreme de volaille*, an anchor rested on a *vol au vent a la Pompadour*. A shabby grey parrot with spiteful eyes screamed horribly, as soon as it heard the rattling of cups and plates, a pug dog, whose right forepaw was wrapped in wadding because it suffered from rheumatism, limped about on three legs. It did not bark, but made a hoarse wheezing sound. One involuntarily entered these rooms with a light step, as if he might unexpectedly meet the coughing old lady.

The manor stood on gently rising ground, not far from the river; behind it was a garden with shady trees, whose interlaced branches formed an arbor, beneath which it was cool and dark even at noon day. The place did not produce a cheerful impression, and yet one could not tell why it should be gloomy. The sky was blue, the horizon clear, the bank of the river, along which grew reeds and willows, was picturesque; on the opposite side stood an ancient forest, which though it did not belong to Malinovka, supplied peasants and owner with wood. Perhaps the lonely situation was the cause of its desolate appearance. For ten leagues around, Alexander informed me, there were no neighbors worthy of the name, all the estates were *terres de rapport*, that is, lands managed by

stewards with the utmost regard for their own interests and the least consideration for those of the owners of the property.

The summer evening was just as I like it ; dark, still and warm. We were in that delightful state of pleasant fatigue, always experienced when, after severe physical exertion one has been refreshed by a bath and change of linen, and then with a cigar or a narghileh—Alexander's pet fancy—stretched oneself at full length on cushions in an attitude more comfortable than graceful.

We did so, and as we were on very intimate terms allowed each other the pleasure of silence, without feeling obliged to rack our brains to discover some interesting subject for conversation. We were on the narrow terrace, he dozing on one bench, I on another ; I cannot deny that we had our legs thrown over the balustrade and our costume was by no means tight or oppressive. One of the maid servants, who caught sight of us, even threw her apron over her head and ran away giggling. The worthy housekeeper, also a legacy, was preparing tea in an adjoining room and communicated with us by means of the lad Vania, who—as she expressed it—was no longer capable of being harmed, which fact augured an abyss of corruption. So we lay and dreamed. Long legged flies alighted impudently on our noses, causing angry sneezes, bats swept noiselessly past us, the sky was black with motionless clouds, which promised a long rain on the morrow. On the damp turf glow worms danced in fan-

tastic circles, as if they were undisputed lords of the soil. I know not whether sleep made my sight uncertain, but they seemed to increase to huge dimensions and I fell into a profound reverie, as to whether these phosphorescent little creatures might not be turned to account for illuminating purposes, and why no one had ever put this clever idea into practice. In front of the terraced fountain was dragging out a lingering existence, a slender stream of water made a feeble effort to leap a few feet, but sank back with a low gurgling sound into its subterranean pipe, from whence after a time it again timidly attempted to gain the upper world. It seemed as if it were reflecting whether it should not follow the old lady's example and vanish from the earth forever. Two or three hundred paces from the house the little sluggish river crept along; the mist rising from it gave warning of fever in the early spring; the dead aunt had had a passion for prescribing for those who fell victims to it, and was entirely indifferent whether she used allopathic or homœopathic treatment; she had two apothecaries whose medicaments she took by turns with the strictest impartiality. It spoke well for the vigorous constitutions of the peasants, that they victoriously resisted this treatment. Now the season for fog was over, the white veil did not rest on the meadow.

“Who's there?” cried Alexander suddenly, starting up

I started, as I have already remarked, my nerves are very sensitive.

“What’s the matter?” I asked angrily, why do you disturb our comfortable repose?”

“Something is creeping about down by the river—don’t you see the light yonder?”

“A glow worm,” I replied peevishly, “but people don’t usually challenge these glittering creatures. You are terribly unpoetical.”

“That’s no glow worm—it’s a stable lantern.”

I slowly raised my head.

A reddish light was certainly gliding by the rushes, and we distinctly heard a slight rustling sound, as if some one were forcing his way through them.

“Holloa!” repeated my friend, with an unusual expenditure of breath.

“A thin hollow voice, such as is peculiar to elderly, childish people, answered; the words were inaudible, only the plaintive whining tone echoed from the river. Vania trembled violently, his busy fancy wavered between two suppositions; either it was a Russalka wandering along the shore and uttering low wails, which always foreboded misfortune and death, or it was a robber, who meant first to set fire to the reeds and then the house. His teeth chattered audibly, and he protested he would rather forfeit his salvation, of which he thought himself sure, than run into the open jaws of the danger.

The shouting to and fro continued, the distance gradu-

ally lessened, the light and the whining voice came nearer. An old man with bent figure appeared between the trees, he carried a lantern in his hand and humbly explained to the Barin,* that he was only trying to catch some cray-fish. After this justification of his conduct he tottered back, the reddish light again glided over the reeds, the plashing of oars soon became audible, the startled wild ducks flew screaming into the air, and it was sometime before the excitement among the water fowl subsided.

I lighted a cigar and drank my fourth cup of tea.

“Alexander!”

“Well Carl Ivanovitsch?”

“Do you know that you are wonderfully lucky?”

“How so?”

“Your family seems to consist entirely of rich uncles and aunts, which is more than I can say of mine. Those of my beloved relatives, who are blessed with this world’s goods, rejoice in a proportionate number of male and female descendants. One old cousin of my mother, who was my last hope, married in his sixtieth year and his seventeen year old wife gave him at the end of the proper time a fat scion, who as the *recherche de paternite* is *interdite*; was joyfully welcomed by the happy father. When I compare my fate with yours! Two uncles have left you two estates, an aunt a house, and now this worthy lady—what was her name?”

* Master.

“Tatiana Gregorievna.”

“Whose existence you did not suspect, till the law informed you of it in the pleasantest way. You are a very rich man, and yet you unfortunately know nothing about spending money. You don’t gamble, you don’t bet, you are neither a gourmand nor a drunkard, you despise women, have no hobbies—tell me, in the name of all the saints, what under such circumstances you can do with an income of sixty thousand roubles. There is nothing left except to marry. You are thirty years old, and without flattery, a handsome man, a perfect gentleman, energetic enough to hold the reins of the household firmly, in spite of feminine cunning—I think you ought to take the step, as a duty to your property, your native land. Besides, I should have no objection to it! I would pay your wife as much attention as is proper for your friend hold your first born over the baptismal font—”

“Gently, gently, Carl Ivanovitsch, you are disposing of my future quite too obligingly—I shall die a bachelor.”

“Ridiculous! It would do very well if I said that, who know women too thoroughly to believe in their power of bestowing happiness. But you, Alexander Gregorovitsch, who belong to the small number of idealists so rapidly vanishing from Russia; in your eyes a halo surrounds every woman’s head, you maintain in all you, intercourse with the fair sex a delicate, respectful reserve which is almost provoking, as the charming Countess T.

said a short time ago—by the way, she flirted with you abominably. Why don't you wish to marry?"

"Because in a week after the wedding I should no longer love my wife."

"Who allows you to hold my opinions? It's sheer intellectual robbery."

"We arrived at the same result by different methods, you are a *mauvais sujet* because you—"

"Let that pass, *mon cher*, it requires no explanation—but I'm curious to hear what objections you have to make to the tie, which so generally tempts those it binds to evil, that the church has sought out her finest fetters to unite the fugitives."

"There was a time, when I dreamed that the wife would know how to retain the charm, of the betrothed—"

"Oh! you strange enthusiast. I take the liberty of making the quotation, because you cultivate German literature with these ideas you must of course be vowed to perpetual celibacy. How were your eyes opened!"

"I have not listened in vain to the confidences of my two best friends. Our pattern young ladies, a week after their wedding day, often behave towards their husbands with a freedom which makes them blush for themselves and the waiting maids. If a goddess would not shrink from arranging her toilette in my presence, she would be divested of every charm; if she had a mouth like a rose bud and a smile like sunlight; they would no longer attract me if I had seen her clean her teeth with *poudre dentri-*

fice, accompanying the operation with the necessary gurgling sounds. I am somewhat sensitive in this respect, and have never understood why, merely because two persons are married, the simplest rules of propriety must be disregarded."

"Well, well that objection could be removed by means of separate dressing-rooms. Of course you must throw overboard all illusions about the ideal nature of woman, they won't do, I tell you, they won't do! Meantime I hope to be a witness of your conversion, Alexander Gregorovitsch."

He shook his head and turned his face to the wall.

"Don't waste your powers of persuasion, Carl Ivanovitsch, my aversion has more serious reasons; I should fear by taking this step to defy fate—all the marriages in my family have been unhappy. My parents were only bound together by the stern rules of the church; my mother lived on her estates in the South, my father, it is true, resided in the North, thousand of miles away, yet one cast a shadow on the other's path—my sister was only released from unendurable tyranny by an early death, my aunt, my mother's older sister, fled from her husband and found a miserable end in some out of the way corner of the earth, her only brother shot himself, after having, it is said, murdered his friend in a fit of wild jealousy; my grandmother made life a hell to my grandfather, who certainly deserved it a thousand-fold—you will admit, that these examples are by no means encouraging—they

say that on our family rests the curse, that every marriage shall result in despair and shame."

In spite of my lazy ease, I started up to obtain a glimpse of Alexander's face—was this gloomy tone serious? Did he really believe in the power of such a baleful prophecy? His head was resting on his arm, his black waving hair fell back from the proud forehead, his eyes, shaded by dark brows, had a strangely thoughtful expression. It was a new discovery to me, to find that he allowed superstitious fears to obtain control over him. This mood, I instantly perceived, could not be dispelled by a bad joke, and as I knew of nothing wiser to say, I sank back on my cushions, stretched my legs still farther over the balustrade, and was silent. My friend also remained mute.

It has always afforded me pleasure to look through the windows of a brilliantly lighted room; the persons moving about within produce the same impression as the actors on a stage. But the charm is perhaps still greater, if the apartment is silent and unoccupied, every article of furniture then appears in a certain sense to have a face, the folds of the curtains seem to breathe, the lifeless objects begin to stretch and stir—which we call creaking—as if a spell had been removed from them. From my place I could overlook the drawing-room. The housekeeper had gone away, and instead of the samovar* an old-fashioned Carcel lamp, which gave a very clear light, had been placed on the table. Opposite me was the

* Tea-urn.

mantel-piece, a shabby arm chair stood near it; Tatiana Gregorievna, the aunt, had probably spent her long evenings here, occupied in the artistic fancy work, for whose preservation yonder tall basket, woven of bark, had doubtless served. Had she never been terribly bored, and from time to time glanced sleepily at the bronze clock, on which a graceful mythological God was bearing away a struggling maiden? Had it never made her impatient to see the figures eternally balancing on one leg?

The account book lay on the window-sill, where the lady could easily reach it when she looked over the bills with the housekeeper. Alexander had told me that she managed her property admirably, accumulated a large sum of money without oppressing the peasants, and left the estate in a flourishing condition. I wondered that under such circumstances she had remained unwedded, like a second Queen Bess, that no enterprising country nobleman had made the attempt to induce her to try the joys of married life. She must have been determined not to change her condition and seemed to have transmitted her anti-matrimonial prejudices to her nephew and heir, who would smoke his narghileh and read newspapers in the very chair, where she had plied her embroidery needle and crochet hook. When some gay bachelor like myself did not bear him company and fill the house with gayety and laughter, it would be as quiet and lonely as if the old lady still wandered about in her lavender dress,

dusting the porcelain vases containing the artificial flowers.

On the right of the mantel-piece hung a picture in a broad, clumsy, blackened gilt frame. I had not noticed it before, but now the lamp light fell full upon it and I perceived that it had been executed by the hand of some clever artist. It was the portrait of a man about sixty years of age, the blue ribbon of the order of Andrew crossed his broad breast, the hilt of his sword was set with jewels, the hand resting upon it, though partially concealed by a lace cuff, looked hard and muscular—whatever it seized, it would surely have clutched in an iron grasp and never released. The gentleman had powdered hair, the thick queue was tied with a black bow, whose ends according to the fashion of the day, were brought forward and fastened on the cravat with a breast-pin. The bushy dark eye-brows formed a striking contrast to the white powder, a contrast which increased the unpleasant impression produced by the features. A cloud lowered upon the narrow, massive brow, and threatened to discharge its thunderbolts at any moment. The coarse, full contour of the mouth and chin betrayed a cruel, sensual nature. The face was not positively ugly, but it lacked every noble line, the eyes were piercing and had the steady gaze of the beast tamer, before which the fiercest animal slinks growling into the farthest corner of its cage. The court dress of white velvet, embroidered with gold, the Brussels lace cravat, the almost effeminate

elegance of the whole costume only made the brutal despotism of the face still more repellant. This man was like the ideal my fancy had conjured up of that rude, powerful favorite of the Russian Semiramis, who riding whip in hand, effected a reconciliation with his imperial love by force.

The power exerted by the living man over his fellow mortals, was not lost even in the portrait. Obeying some secret impulse, my eyes constantly wandered back to him, and the more frequently I looked, the more threatening grew the face within the frame. I would have sworn that the thick bushy brows contracted and the eyes flashed, that the hand rested more heavily on the sword hilt. If the old lady in the lavender dress spent her evenings in the sole company of this unpleasant picture, she must have had strong nerves. There—did not a fierce smile play around the mouth? I started up—no, a huge moth had made the flame of the lamp flicker and cast a changeful glimmer over the painted face. I stretched myself and shut my eyes—what was the old gentleman with the blue ribbon to me? He might look down from the wall to his heart's content and wonder what had become of the old lady, who had formerly embroidered so unweariedly.

I pushed a soft leather cushion under my head, and smoked a real imported Havanna, the soft summer air fanned my temples, the dark clouds above me parted, several stars gleamed through the rifts, a shooting star, which seemed to leave a long glittering trail behind it

darted obliquely across the horrizon—it was the month of August.

“ *Cen'est qu'une etoile qui file, qui file, file et disparaît fi,*” I murmured. My memory is uncommonly tenacious and, to the horror of my friends, I am partial to making quotations.

“Do you still retain your fancy for Béranger?” asked my host.

“The only French poet, who is worthy to be named beside a Puschkin,” I answered in a blasé tone. The most important and necessary thing for you, my dear Alexander, is to order comfortable seats for your new house. Your honored aunt did not understand the requirements of modern ease, there isn't a single luxurious piece of furniture in the whole house—I'll send you some couches, arm chairs, etc. from St. Petersburg—partly on my own account, my left side aches.”

“My right foot has fallen asleep—suppose we change places.”

Out of consideration for my own limbs I declared myself ready, and after considerable yawning and stretching found my position endurable. I could now overlook the other half of the drawing room, and my eyes first sought the companion to the masculine portrait, which I supposed was on the left of the mantel-piece. Right! There it hung—oh! what a bewitching, dreamily beautiful woman! I leaned far into the room, to look at the sweet face more closely.

“What are you doing, Carl Ivanovitsch?”

“Paying homage to beauty. Tell me, Alexander Gregorovitsch, to whom did these divine features belong? I never beheld such charms, and am in the act of falling madly in love with a picture. This is an angel, a goddess, and a woman. Who was she, what was her name?”

“She was the first wife of my mother’s father.”

“And the gentleman with the order of Andrew?”

“My grandfather, the husband of the beautiful woman.”

“Her husband—poor thing!”

“Yes, she was indeed worthy of pity. Look at her closely, is she not the very embodiment of sorrow and suffering?”

It was as he said. The little head, on which rested a small coronet of diamonds drooped as if oppressed by the glittering border; a lock of unpowdered dark hair fell on the white brow and cast a shadow over the large, almond shaped black eyes, which were fixed thoughtfully on a half-withered rose, that lay between the slender fingers. The delicate nose formed a straight line with the brow, the sweet rosebud mouth, the clear complexion, the faultless neck, the gently sloping shoulders—all conformed to the requirements of the noblest beauty. Even the heavy magnificence of the dress—a purple velvet mantle lined with ermine and fastened on the shoulders by diamond clasps, an underskirt of *drap d’argent*, ropes of pearls on the neck and arms, could not destroy the

girlish charm of the graceful figure. A famous artist must have painted this picture. Who was he? "Leviski," replied my friend, "an admirable portrait painter, who was attached to the court of Catharine II. To be sure, this is his most successful work, the fate of the unhappy young wife may have excited his compassion, perhaps in the despair of her crushed heart, bleeding amid the hollow glitter of court life, she made him her confidant. I infer this from what a superficial observer would call a whim, a caprice of the artist—look, in the calix of the rose is a worm, which has already commenced its work of destruction. Underneath some hand has scrawled :

"Le ver rongeur—symbole de sa vie fletrie."

"Do you know any of the particulars of her life?" I asked eagerly. "You have never told me any thing about your family history."

"Because my knowledge of it was very imperfect, my aunt's papers, which I found here in her writing desk, first disclosed the past. My grandfather, Count W—"

"Count Gregor Michailovitsch W.?" I eagerly interrupted, "I did not know you had such a famous or rather notorious ancestor. Was he not one of the favorites of the great Catharine?"

My friend nodded. "She loaded him with wealth and honors, he distinguished himself by his barbarity in the Turkish war and was afterwards made field-marshal. More powerful and handsomer men crowded him out of

the empress, favor, but she remained tolerably gracious to him to the last. Although he did not marry until advanced in years, he had two wives, the first—yonder beautiful creature, whose picture no one can see without emotion—died young, the second survived him, and in her he found his mistress. Three children were the offspring of this marriage, two girls and a boy, my mother was the youngest daughter.”

“Count W. your grandfather! This is new to me,” I answered thoughtfully.

“I have never considered it an honor, that the wealth of our family came from a source so impure, therefore my silence ought not to surprise you. The profession of favorite forms one of the darkest pages of Russian history. Thank Heaven, since the first of this century, the throne has been occupied by rulers, whose family life is stainless—Of course I never saw my grandfather, at the time of his death my mother was still in the nurse’s arms. His son, the only heir of his name, became a suicide to escape from the tortures of remorse—I have already told you, that mad jealousy urged him to commit a crime. He left no children, and thus the name died out, for no one suspected the existence of this old aunt, who only gave signs of life a short time before her death, by appointing me, the last male descendant of the race, her heir.”

“Ah! then Tatiana Gregorievna was a Countess W.” (Out of consideration for my friend, I give merely the initials of the name.)

“Yes the daughter of the beautiful woman who resembled a withered rose.”

“She was unmarried?”

“Certainly, marriage could not fail to inspire her with aversion and horror. She had an almost childish dread of the whole masculine sex, the wicked world, to which her gentle mother had fallen a victim: and felt safe only on her own estate, which during a life of seventy-six years, she never left.”

“I must confess: Alexander Gregorovitsch, that I no longer like this place, now that I know it has so many gloomy associations. I wish your worthy aunt had transformed it into some charitable institution, an asylum for orphaned girls of noble birth; or a hospital for quarrelsome old women. Your grandfather's portrait does not suit the mannikins and Chinese curiosities, it is like the sound of drums mingling with the wailing melody of a flute, it makes a discord in this neat, dainty old maid's home. I shan't be able to lay my head on one of these faded pillows without the uncomfortable thought, that they have stifled burning tears and bitter grief.”

“It may have been so,” replied Alexander, pushing the thick hair back from his brow—“Pardon me for not being a more entertaining host, Carl Ivanoviotsch. I looked forward to your visit with delight, and now you find me moody and sad. I am still under the influence of the impression produced by reading my aunt's papers. You will understand it, if you peruse them yourself. Will it

interest you to learn their contents? They will give you all the particulars of the beautiful countess, tragical fate, for they consist of a journal, notes, and memoirs arranged by an unskilful hand, and written partly in the French and partly in the Russian language—shall I get them for you?”

I eagerly accepted the offer, for I looked forward to these disclosures with the utmost interest. Alexander opened a small, varnished writing desk, on which stood a pot pourri vase filled with dry, dusty rose leaves, and took out a portfolio covered with pale pink satin. On one side was a piece of embroidery in bright colored silks; an urn shaded by a cypress tree, with the inscription: *souvenirs*, around the edge ran a border of triangular ivy leaves, a blue satin ribbon fastened the loose sheets, which were covered with writing in an old fashioned hand.

It was already somewhat late in the evening, and we soon parted each seeking his own sleeping room. My fatigue, however, had disappeared, the portfolio excited my curiosity. I became absorbed reading the papers, which almost deprived me of my nights rest. The first pages contained Countess W's journal, then followed the story of Madame Laurent, her governess, and the conclusion was added by Tatiana Gregorievna, my friend's aunt. She had copied the whole, arranged it, and completed the history from the verbal communications of the faithful old instructress.

With the exception of a few changes and omissions, demanded by due consideration for my friend, I here relate what I read. It is a by no means uninteresting aid to the proper understanding of a period, which consisted of the sharpest contrasts, which beside brilliant deeds and an enlightened, unprejudiced mode of thought, shows traits of roughness and cruelty arising from the defective education or arbitrary nature of individuals, which bear eloquent witness that culture cannot be given by one ruler, but must be slowly and gradually developed from the people.

IRENE'S JOURNAL.

Oui, en non doux printemps
Et fleur de ma jeunesse,
Touites les peinessens
D'une entreme tristesse
Et en rien n'ai plaisir
Qu'en regret et desir,

RUDOVKA, September 25th. 1790.

To-morrow will be my seventeenth birthday. In November, before Lent, perhaps even sooner, if papa gives his consent, we shall be married, Valerian and I. Then I must leave Rudovka and go with my husband—how strange that sounds—to his home. I believe I shall shed a few tears at parting, but the sorrow will not last long, for my dear governess is to go with me, she will not leave me, I am “*sa petite fille chérie*,” to whom she has so long filled a mother place. She is very good, has the kindest heart in the world, there is no doubt of that, to be sure, she is often a little cross and fretful, especially when she has quarreled with papa, which happens very often lately—I don’t see how she can find courage to oppose papa! I scarcely dare to breathe in his pre-

sence, and as soon as he frowns and gets angry, turn cold with fright, and it seems as if all my limbs were paralysed.

Ma bonne (I am the only person who calls her so, the others address her as Pauline Carlovna or Madame Laurent) says my mamma was just such a timid little bird as I, ever in death her face wore an anxious, frightened expression, as if she feared her husband's loud, harsh voice would rouse her from the repose of the grave. She is said to have been remarkably beautiful and delicate, *ma bonne*, who always weeps when she speaks of her, often tells me she was as gentle and good as an angel. She was no Russian, but a German lady, and papa made her acquaintance in Moscow—How did it happen that she married him? I could not have chosen a man so much older, with such stern features and such a harsh laugh!

When, on the other hand, I think of Valerian! My dear, dear Valerian! Isn't it odd, that one can love a stranger so fondly? Is there anything in the world I would not do for him? My heart stops beating when I see him in the distance, and when he stands before me and clasps my hands, throbs so violently, that it is almost painful, and my cheeks burn like fire. And he is no less agitated. "Shut your eyes, he generally whispers," they rob me of my senses."

A separation of a few days is a heavy trial to us both, *ma bonne* teases me by saying, that during his absence I am transformed from a rose into a lily—She cannot im-

agine how I only live and breath in his presence. He will come back to-morrow, he has been away a whole week, for he was obliged to go to Moscow on account of pretended business, but I think it was to buy me a present, perhaps some article of jewelry, a necklace or locket—I should be delighted, for I like to dress though it is really unnecessary. Nobody sees me, and after I am married I shall go into society as little as I do now. Valerian's estate, Malinovka, is even more secluded than ours, and there are scarcely any neighbors. At first he promised to take me to spend the winter in St Petersburg or Moscow, that I might have a glimpse of the great world, but *ma bonne* entirely disapproved of the plan, called St. Petersburg a Babel that swallowed up virtue and innocence, and when we laughed incredulously, grew angry and said to Valerian:

“Don't take my advice amiss, you are only a few years older than the child and have no more experience. It would be unwise, almost unprincipled, to take Irene, as she has been created by God, into the midst of that corrupt society. She would not be there a day without being exposed to the most dangerous snares.”

Valerian was somewhat vexed, and replied that he was man enough to watch over me and protect his rights. *Ma bonne* laugh scornfully—she was now mounted on her favorite hobby

“Rights! Who has any rights in your country?” she asked “Only your empress, and at the utmost her favorite.

I do not know the great Catharine, she must probably be a woman of intellect, since Voltaire corresponds with her and Diderot honors her with his friendship, but she, is nothing but a tyrant and despot, who according to her fancy, can make a nobleman a serf, a slave in a single hour. Such things have been ! ”

I asked her the meaning of favorite. She seemed confused and answered hesitatingly, that it was a high office at court. She always speaks ill of Russia, and daily assures me she would have returned to *sa belle patrie* long ago, if she had not loved me so dearly.

“ It is for your sake I stay in this horrible, barbarous countrys, for your sake, *mignonne* ! ”

Valerian was silent, I noticed that he was somewhat out of humor and tried to coax him back to cheerfulness. *Ma bonne*'s words were not without effect, he gradually decided to renounce all plans for a journey and take me at once to Malinovka. It cost me a slight effort to yield without remonstrance—I scarcely know how the world looks outside of our village—but it was his wish.”

To-morrow, at this hour he will be here ! I shall hang on his arm, he will call me his jewel, his flower, his fairy, his pet, and I shall do nothing but look at him, to impress his beloved face still more closely on my heart. In the evening, before the lamps are lighted, I usually sit at *ma bonne*'s feet and talk of him. If she is in a good humor, she teases me saying I surely cannot remember the color of his hair, for I used to have a very bad memory

for lesson. Isn't it malicious to say such things? I know very well that he has fair waving locks, each one of which I have wound around my fingers, his eyes are blue as corn flowers, he is so tall that I can just rest my head on his shoulder comfortably, his face has a mild noble expression, and his voice sounds soft and sweet as music, I can never weary of hearing it.

His father died when he was still and in the cradle, his mother educated him; even *ma bonne* confesses, that though a Russian, she was an excellent, highly educated lady. She was my mother's best friend, and when a little child I often spent weeks with her in Malinovka. When I grew older, *ma bonne* no longer allowed these visits, she said it was not proper. Not proper! That word has become very familiar to me, for she repeats it on every occasion. While Valerian was completing his education by traveling in foreign countries, I spent some time with his mother. She was beginning to lose her health, and I was obliged to write to her son in her name to hasten his return. He reached home in time to find, her alive and nurse her. Her death moved him deeply, for he has an affectionate heart and felt very lonely, as he has no relatives, he often came to our house to talk with me about his dead mother—well, the rest can be easily imagined.

At first I was afraid papa would refuse his consent—unfortunately he doesn't like Valerian, because the latter is not fond of drinking he never touches brandy—or

playing cards, and is entirely different from the other land owners. "A milk face!" he often calls him, and unpleasant scenes might arise, if they met frequently. But papa is generally away from home, sometimes at the neighbors, sometimes in Moscow, so they rarely see each other and maintain a tolerable degree of friendship in their relations. Lately they have been on still better terms; papa has lost large sums in gambling and found himself embarrassed for money, which troubled him the more, as he wished to obtain the office of a *maréchal de noblesse*. Valérian heard of it and offered him a few thousand roubles, which were gratefully accepted. *Ma bonne*, it is true, looked thoughtful and said: this gulf had already swallowed up one fortune and nothing was ever said of any restoration; it would have been wiser not to put the idea of borrowing money from his son-in-law into Stepan Petrovitch's head, he would fleece him and finally get into a rage if refused, etc. My friend listened with a smile, for he was just then occupied in measuring the length of my hair; when I bend my head back, it almost touches the floor. Valérian says no gold brodered *manteau de corde* can compare with this dark, silken soft cloak bestowed upon me by Nature. *Ma bonne* grew angry at this childishness, and sent me out of the room, that Mascha might braid it smoothly.

SEPTEMBER 29 th. 1790

I must give an account of my birthday. Early in the morning, while I was still in bed, *ma bonne* came gently into my room to congratulate me. She was very much agitated, and when I sat up and threw both arms around her, burst into violent sobs.

“My dearest child,” she said, “I promised your poor mother, who was a saint on earth, to protect you with my heart’s blood and let no power separate me from you—I have taught you all I know myself—I wish it had been more, but you have become a lady and far outstripped your poor governess. Yet I shall not think my task performed, until I see you stand before the altar with Valérian. I will speak to your father as soon as possible, that your wedding day may at last be named.”

“Oh! pray do, dear mother,” I exclaimed with sparkling eyes, “you don’t know how I long for that day.”

Ma bonne’s face instantly assumed a stern expression, and in spite of her emotion she gave me a severe lecture which ended with the words, that a well trained young girl would not even think, far less speak, of such things—I should like to know why not. Then she gave me a pair of netted mitts, as fine as cobweb, which she had made for me herself. I drew them on to try them, they

fitted exquisitely and my arms gleamed like snow through the black meshes.

Mascha came to dress me and as it was my birthday, *ma bonne* let me put on a thin white robe trimmed with lace and knots of light blue ribbon a gift from Valérian's mother. I thought I looked very well, and Mascha clapped her hands with delight. The maid servants and peasant women came to kiss the hem of my dress; most of them were clad in dirty rags, unwashed and uncombed. One was better dressed, she even had a silk handkerchief over her head and a heavy garnet necklace round her throat, a strong healthy girl, with fat red cheeks; she lives alone in a hut somewhat away from the village, though she is still unmarried and has parents. I can't endure her, because she stares at people so boldly. On such a day, however, we must harbor no unkind feelings in our hearts, so I tried to answer her greeting pleasantly, when with her disagreeable smile she pressed forward and offered me a pirogg * she had baked herself. It looked very tempting, had a golden yellow crust, and smelt of fresh mushrooms. The gift was certainly well meant, and I had no reason to dislike the girl, so I held out my hand to receive it—when *ma bonne* rushed forward, her eyes flashing angrily, hastily pushed the girl back and throwing the dish on the floor, exclaimed in a voice trembling with indignation :

“How dare you come near the young lady, you good

* Nussian Dish.

for nothing creature? You get more and more impudent every day, but wait, your rule will soon be over, and neither your silk handkerchief nor your garnet necklace will save you from being well beaten and driven out to work in the fields. One like you should remain outside, the sight of you is an insult to your young mistress."

The girl cast down her eyes in confusion and her red cheeks grew even redder than usual, the women nudged each other and gazed scornfully at her. When she perceived this, she tossed her head proudly, looked boldly around the room, and, as she walked towards the door muttered that she would complain to the master, she needn't submit to anything, the master would be on her side.

Ma bonne trembled so violently with agitation, that she was obliged to sit down. I could not understand her indignation, gently stroked her cheeks, and begged her to calm herself. She pressed me to her heart and said :

"You dear innocent child, I trust you will soon leave this house forever. My strength is no longer sufficient to guard you from every breath of impurity. The wretched creature !"

She was really angry, her nose seemed actually to peck at her enemy and she hissed the words through her clenched teeth, her complexion became a yellowish brown, which is always the case when her bile is excited. Valérian's arrival dispelled this ill humor. Ah! how I screamed with delight, when his troika turned into the

courtyard. The road was in a horrible condition, for it had rained hard the day before, one wheel of the carriage had broken off and been fastened on with ropes. I wept and laughed out of pure joy, he looked so handsome in his coat of sable fur. We had been separated a whole week, for he came straight from Moscow. I ran out to receive his first greeting, he caught me in his arms and clasping me in a passionate embrace covered my face with kisses, then pushed me a little back, and gazing at me with an expression of delight, exclaimed :

“Irene dearest, you have grown more beautiful than ever, and I am the luckiest fellow in the world !”

With these words he clasped me in his arms and laughing joyfully lifted me from the ground, as if he would like to carry me away.

Ma bonne had not yet recovered her good humor, for she said angrily :

“Cease such jests, *Monsieur Valérien*, un jeune homme comme il faut, doesn’t take such liberties with a lady.”

He flushed crimson and placing me on my feet, laid my hand on his arm, and led me ceremoniously into the house. Meantime his servant had taken some carefully packed object from under the seat of the carriage brought it in and placed it on the table.

It could be nothing but a present for me, and I was in the greatest suspense. Valérien enjoyed my ill concealed curiosity, and slowly removed one wrapping after

another. A wonderful object appeared! A jewel case made of ebony inlaid with mosaic, and resting on golden lion's claws, while a painting on ivory was set in the lid. And what a painting. A real master piece! I know a little about such things for *ma bonne* has taught me to use water-colors and crayons, she was very fond of drawing and painting in her young days. The subject was a touching and poetical one. A white rosebud, just tinged with pink, bent on its slender stalk above a broken column, as if bewailing the transitoriness of all earthly things; the background was dark, the outlines of other trees and flowers only suggested, but the white rose illumined by the moonlight, seemed to live and breathe.

"*Dieu!*" exclaimed *ma bonne*, "*comme c'est triste, Monsieur Valerien!* How could you select for your betrothed bride a picture that reminds one of a sepulchre?"

"Why do you make such a comparison?" he replied. "I have a very different interpretation. The white rose is the emblem of Irene, she is equally beautiful, pure and full of fragrance and poesy. Am I not right?"

He smiled and I, I covered my eyes with my hands and wept—I was too happy.

He handed me a tiny gold key, I turned it in the lock—a gleaming necklace of pearls rested on the dark red velvet.

"Your bridal jewels!" he whispered tenderly.

It was far too beautiful and costly I told him, but he would not listen.

"Pearls! murmured *ma bonne*, tears! perhaps enough may yet flow."

She shook her head anxiously and her kind old face, which I love so dearly, wore a troubled expression. Yet it was a happy day. Papa returned from a visit in the neighborhood and brought me a diamond ring, which *ma bonne* declared he had probably won at the gaming table, as it was no longer new, and I should not wear it. This however, would have offended papa, and as he was in a good humor, Valérian thought we ought not to vex him. He himself wrapped a silk thread several times around my finger, that the ring, which was much too large for me, might not slip off. After dinner the two gentlemen played billiards. Papa, who has had a billiard table several years—it was sent from St. Petersburg, is a very skillful player, while Valérian has had little practice. The former therefore won the game, which seemed to afford him pleasure. *Ma bonne*, who looked on with me, muttered something about robbery. Papa has very quick ears, he caught the word and asked her what she meant.

"Exactly what I said," she answered boldly, it is not honorable to take advantage of the ignorance of your guest and future son-in-law, to get money from him."

He angrily threw down the cue and striking his clenched hand on the billiard table, exclaimed; he should be very glad when the old Frenchwoman left a house, in which according to her opinion, honorable dealings were

not practiced ; she might return to Paris, where the *canaille* now taught lessons to the nobility.

She laid aside her spectacles and fixing her grey eyes steadily upon him, answered quietly.

“ Your coarse speeches will not drive me away, any more than your failure to pay me my salary. You know I promised your dead wife—an angel, if there ever was one on earth—to remain with Irene, remain with her under all circumstances—As for those whom you choose to call “ *canaille*,” I can only reply, that your Russian aristocrats are delighted to get our cooks and barbers to educate and polish their children.”

It was a very painful scene. Papa looked as if he would like to strangle *ma bonne*, but her firmness involuntarily awed him, he laughed and turning on his heel left the room, banging the door behind him.

Valérian gently represented to my second mother, that she gained nothing in this way, except unpleasant scenes, but she answered somewhat sharply :

“ You don’t understand, Monsieur, you have no knowledge of human nature. The more forbearing and submissive you are to Stepan Petrovitsch, the less restraint he will impose upon himself, until at last he’ll show you every indignity, because he thinks you a coward. If you wish to live peaceably with him and have his respect, you must adopt the same rude tone. To be sure, everybody can’t manage it, I too was obliged to learn.”

So the day ended in general ill humor.

OCTOBER 1st 1790.

Although it is late in the autumn, the weather is still beautiful and we can remain out of doors in the afternoon till the sun sets—I have been reflecting on my lot, and do not long for the pleasures and entertainments of the gay world, it must be tiresome to go from one party to another, and with my fear of strangers, I should feel very desolate in a crowd. *Ma bonne* too says I am not strong enough to endure the fatiguing life of a great city. “Your mother shed many tears before your birth,” she said to me one day, “that is why you are such a delicate little creature, who requires affectionate care and consideration to thrive.”

Why, I think my health is excellent; I can't be accused of timidity either, on horseback I am even reckless and hold the reins firmly, in spite of my small hands—only I'm easily frightened when people are angry, then I seem perfectly helpless, as if I were the spoil of inexorable powers.

I like country life, perhaps because I know no other, Our garden has become a wilderness, since Papa dismissed the gardener and no longer troubled himself about keeping in order the grounds my mamma laid out. The little temples summer-houses and bridges, made of white birch bark have fallen into ruin, when the cook has no wood at hand, he gets a column, a bench, or a piece of

the balustrade, and makes a fire with it. The raspberry and currant bushes, on the contrary, have grown into an impenetrable thicket, and I have never seen such huge sun-flowers as bloom on our land. Valérian and I often undertake journeys of discovery, which lead us a long distance, for the park is not enclosed but runs into the forest; the booty we bring back isn't valuable; bird-nests, mushrooms, hazel-nuts, and usually a torn dress, about which *ma bonne* is very angry, because she has to mend it. But she soon recovers her good humor, especially when I remind her that Paul and Virginia also wandered through the depths of a primeval forest, and their mother's did not scold them for it. She is delighted with Bernadin de St. Pierres story, we read it together, and I know not which wept most bitterly. It is impossible to describe love in terms more delicate and touching, I must confess that, compared with this wonderful romance, Numa Pompilius and William Tell made very little impression upon me, I of course imagine Paul a second Valérian, he is just as noble and generous, the only difference is that he has blue eyes, in every other respect he resembles him exactly. I should die if I were parted from him—but who could be so cruel? Fortunately I have no aristocratic old aunt, who might wish to force a brilliant fate upon me.

OCTOBER 7th. 1790.

Ma bonne has held her head much higher for several

days. Valérian, who always endeavors to prove his regard for her by various little attentions, brought from Moscow a package of French newspapers, which he obtained from an acquaintance. "*Ma patrie!*" she cried, her eyes sparkled with almost youthful fire, and she kissed the crushed, worn sheets. With her spectacles on her nose, she speedily became absorbed in reading them and forget everything around her. Late that evening she came into my room, her thin wrinkled face wore an expression of solemnity, she seemed to have grown taller, so triumphantly erect was her bearing. Seating herself on the edge of my bed, she told me of the wonderful events which were occurring in Paris.

"It is sublime!" she exclaimed enthusiastically, "the work, injustice and despotism have spent a thousand years in accomplishing, has been overthrown in a single night. Impress the date upon your mind, my child, in after years men will reverently remember, that on the 19th. of June 1790, was uttered the decree, that all men should be equal on earth as they are in the sight of their Father in Heaven. Dukes, marquises, and counts have ceased to exist, there will be only nobility of nature and princes of intellect. "Oh! my child, I a poor insignificant governess, who has grown grey while eating the bitter bread of servitude in a foreign land, suddenly felt ennobled and strengthened! I no longer need bow before blatant stupidity adorned with a title, for my human dignity is recognized by the law. Mirabeau,

who was born to inherit a count's coronet, eloquently protested against the privileges of the nobility, and I should like to embrace him for it. True, they say he is an unprincipled man—but who can condemn one, who battles so boldly for the oppressed, poor, and miserable. The punishment of his sins falls on himself alone, while the fruits of his noble efforts will be reaped by all humanity. I am glad to live to see the dawn of a new day.”

Although I could not share her joy, I perfectly understood it. The few letters she received from home had informed her of the convocation of the *etats generaux* the *assemblee nationale*, and newspapers, which she obtained here and there, filled up the gaps in the information; in spite of her years she was too impulsive to be able to keep matters that interested her, shut up in her own breast, so she had often spoken to me of these events, and tried to arouse my sympathy. But France was so far away, I should probably never go there, the fate of the country was really a matter of indifference to me, and I only listened attentively to please *ma bonne*.

“A new day?” I asked, repeating her last words, “with us in Russia too? Then I shall no longer be a lady of noble birth, but the equal of peasants and plebians’ wives? I shan’t like that.”

“*En Russie*,” she replied in a very different tone, “a century must yet elapse ere reaching the point where France stands to-day. In this pitiable country, even the

nobility possess scarcely a smattering of culture, and a very slight smattering it is, you may suppose. I'm not speaking of Valérian," she added, "he is an intelligent, well educated young man, a brilliant exception, who arouses the wonder of his equals in rank. The people, however, unfortunately stand on the lowest step of all, they lack even the first rudiments of culture."

"But even if the serfs were set free, what would become of them? You know very well, that they will only work under the eye of an overseer, and when left to themselves become idle and dissolute. Are you not always complaining about the carelessness of the people, who must be forced to do their duty like children?"

"And yet they have their virtues too, though it is true they are those of slaves, they are patient, good-natured, faithful, these germs would develop still more, if their human nature was respected. You avoid passing through the village, because the huts are so wretched and dirty—have you never thought of the cause of this misery?"

I gazed at her in astonishment—no, why should I? I had only pitied the poor people, who could not be helped.

"They do not know the pleasure of possessing anything," continued *ma bonne* eagerly, "they are aware that the huts they occupy, the fields they till, do not belong to them. Why should they take the trouble to keep their homes neat and orderly, to labor industriously in the fields, when their master has a right to drive them

from this so-called possession, sell them, and send them far away where they must commence anew? And still more—do you remember the fair-haired Lukeria, whom your father would not allow to marry the man she loved? She was to become the wife of Ivan the coachman, who didn't even care for *her*, because he liked another."

"And she went to the river and drowned herself," I said shuddering. I had chanced to be near the spot, when the women, wailing piteously, drew out the lifeless body—I had never seen a corpse—the spectacle was a horrible one. The blue lips, the staring eyes—I had fled from the terrible sight in horror.

"Papa is a very strict master," I said softly, "Valérien would never do so."

"Of course he will never be so cruel, I am sure of that. But is it not sad to depend upon the good or bad disposition of an individual? Suppose some more powerful person should come and seek to tear you from the man you love?"

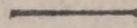
"That can never be!" I exclaimed starting up in bed, "my birth is noble, no one has any power over me except my father."

"Yes, with you the nobility alone possess the rights, which belong to every human being," she answered gravely, "and even these rights are of little value in a half barbarous country."

"I can't help it," I answered in an undertone, as *ma bonne* looked at me reproachfully.

"Of course not, my pet, but I want you to keep a tender heart for the sufferings of your fellow creatures, and not live thoughtlessly on, without remembering that there is sorrow around us."

"Yes, yes, I will certainly be a kind, indulgent mistress," I assured her, already half asleep.



ONE DAY LATER.

This afternoon I took a long ride with Valérian, and, that I might not be obliged to leave him so soon, allowed myself to be persuaded to accompany him a long distance on the way home; but as after sunset darkness rapidly closed in, for in our neighborhood there is rarely any twilight, he wouldn't allow me to ride back alone. There was a discussion, which ended in his turning back with me and not leaving my side, until we reached the first huts in the village.

What a lovely evening it was! The sky bright with stars and the air soft and still. Valérian pressed his horse close to mine, his hand rested on my saddle, his hair brushed my cheek. The forest path, which was so narrow that I was obliged to hold up the skirt of my habit, lest I should be left hanging on some branch, was covered with a thick carpet of moss; we did not hear the sound of our horses' hoofs, it was so still and mysterious under

the dark trees, that we talked in whispers. Once I fancied I saw two lights gleaming through the bushes, and uttered a low cry.

“What is it, my darling?” asked Valérian in terror, throwing his arm around me.

“A wolf!” I answered trembling, pointing to where the spots had vanished.

He laughed at me, these savage guests were not to be feared, nothing was heard of them far or near, they only ventured from their hiding places into the vicinity of human habitations in the midst of winter. Perhaps what I had seen was only a will o’ the wisp, or some decaying log. He may have been right, but I noticed how my horse’s nostrils dilated and how violently he lashed his tail around—tokens that all was not right.

Outside the village we had taken a somewhat long farewell—people usually have most to say to each other at the last moment—during which it had grown late; I knew what awaited me on my arrival; stern reproofs! I would try to slip into my room secretly, that I might not fall into *ma bonne*’s hands at once, my conscience was not at ease, I had remained away too long and she had undoubtedly been anxious about me. As I glided through the ante-room, I heard papa’s voice in the dining hall uttering my name in a tone of anger. He had been absent several days, and as usual fixed no time for his return—now he was here again, my heart throbbed anxiously, I did not venture to appear before him at that mo-

ment. Holding my breath, I pressed into a corner and thus became an involuntary listener, as the conversation was carried on in very loud tones, and the door only ajar. Papa seemed to be having an interview with *ma bonne*, which as usual, threatened to result in a quarrel.

“What is it about Irene?” he repeated impatiently.

“Nothing unusual,” she answered sharply, “at least other fathers don’t think it strange, when they are requested to remember that they have daughters.”

“Unfortunately I can’t forget it, a thousand inconveniences prevent that. Why must the child have been a girl? I should have greatly preferred a boy, he would have needed far less consideration.”

“It’s new to me, that you show any consideration,” she answered sarcastically, “perhaps one proof of it is the conduct of that creature, Prascovia, who dared to show her bold face in the house on Irene’s birth-day. I swear to you, that if it ever happens again, I’ll drive her out of the house with a whip myself, if she is ten times your—”

I could not understand what followed, for *ma bonne* spoke through her closed teeth, but I could imagine how she had clenched her hands, while her eyes flashed fire.

“Silence!” cried papa furiously, “or—”

“Or what?” she asked scornfully, “with what will you threaten me?” I’m not your serf, whom you can order to be lashed to death at your pleasure, and besides

I am not wholly defenceless *dans ce pays execrable*. You know, that at any moment I can apply for aid to the French Consul at Moscow—”

“Such an old Frenchman is really possessed by Satan,” he muttered, grinding his teeth, “why do you stop me? Get out of my sight, I’ve no inclination to listen to your chatter any longer.”

You are in a bad humor, because you have again met with heavy losses at the gaming table. But whether good or bad it’s all the same to me, what I have to settle with you will permit no delay—Irene—”

“Irene again! Where is she, why doesn’t she come to welcome me? You have brought her up so admirably, that she shows no respect for her father.”

“I don’t know where she is at this moment, she disappeared with Valérian Maxinitsch and must be punished for it by a severe reproof.”

“Oh! dear, it was as I supposed, I had a long lecture before me. “However,” continued *ma bonne*, “the child is far too innocent to suspect that she has done anything wrong—this perpetual wandering about on the part of the young people must cease. I’m too old to follow them everywhere, and unfortunately there is nobody to take my place. *Monsieur Valerian* is an honorable young man, it is true—but how can one trust a passionate, eager heart of two and twenty? It is the office of parents and guardians to avert the danger of temptation.”

“Oho, the milk face;” laughed papa contemptuously, he’s much too virtuous and timid.”

“Virtue doesn’t always hold out in the presence of beauty like Irene’s ”

“You are ridiculously infatuated with her, her beauty is not remarkable. Her figure is fragile, and there is scarcely a tinge of color in her cheeks. She would be entirely unnoticed in St. Petersburg and Moscow.”

“I think otherwise,” she answered drily, “I hope she will never go there—it would not be for her happiness.” I blushed in my dark corner at hearing myself thus discussed, I instinctively felt that these words had a meaning, that escaped me. If I had only not been obliged to pass the dining room to reach my own chamber, which was on the second story.

“In a word, I think it will be best for the young people to marry soon,” said *ma bonne*, “why should they wait? True, they are still almost children, but I shall go with them to advise and help them. Then Valerian Maxinitsch will no longer be obliged to spend his time on the highway, as he now does, greatly to the injury of his horse. Winter is close at hand, the roads will soon be impassable, and he can’t go from one estate to the other.”

“Who asks him to come every day?”

“It is natural for him to wish to see his betrothed bride, and Irene would droop if she were separated from him for any length of time. When he spent a week in Moscow a short time ago, I really felt anxious about her,

she neither ate nor slept, and grew paler and paler—it's time to put an end to this state of affairs. Let the marriage take place at the end of this month."

"What an idea! That would be in three weeks, no! I won't ever talk of such a thing."

"And why not?" she asked sharply, "you are not so affectionate a father, that the thought of parting from your child causes you any trouble."

"I won't consent to it, that's enough."

"You must be able to give a reason."

"I have many reasons, but I don't choose to tell you of them."

I wanted to cry! I had so confidently hoped that papa would at last be induced to give his consent, and now he refused again! *Ma bonne* was not so easily discouraged.

"Shall I tell you why you won't consent?" she began. "The difficulty lies in the little fortune Irene's mother brought you at her marriage, and which you would be obliged to pay your son-in-law as a dowry. Of course you squandered every speck long ago, you have gambled away your daughter's property, as well as the larger portion of your own. But you have no right to make Irene wretched, as well as rob her. *Monsieur Valerian* has been informed that his bride would bring him no dowry, and was noble enough to declare that this would not have the slightest influence upon his love, rich or poor, Irene would be the most precious treasure.

My dear, dear Valérian ! Each day I discover some new trait of character, which increases my loving admiration.

Papa seemed embarrassed, *ma bonne* understood how to extort his respect.

“Nonsense,” he muttered angrily, “who told you this absurd story ? I have, it is true withdrawn Irene’s property from the place where it was invested, but only to obtain a higher rate of interest—”

“Save yourself the trouble of telling me any lies, *Monsieur*, no one asks you about the money,” though it’s a most shameful piece of injustice—But as this difficulty is removed, you will probably consent to defer the wedding no longer than the time appointed, the last of October. Stop, the 26th. will be Valérian’s birthday, that is a charming coincidence, you will be able to delight him with a gift, that to him is the most priceless thing on earth, while it costs you absolutely nothing—for you have never cared for Irene.”

“She has the tongue of a viper,” growled papa yawning aloud. He was very tired, or *ma bonne* would have had a harder battle to fight. When he comes home from his excursions or a residence in Moscow, he does nothing but eat and sleep. I cannot remember, ever having exchanged a dozen words with him, I kiss his hand and bid him good morning and good night, that is the extent of my intercourse with him. I uttered a sigh of relief when both went away ; I heard *ma bonne* walk down the pas-

sage with the bunch of keys jingling at her belt, she was going to the store room to give out the provisions for supper. I glided out of my hiding place and ran to my chamber, whose door I bolted behind me. To slip off my riding habit and put on a gingham house dress was the work of a minute, and I was sitting at the work table with downcast eyes, holding a piece of embroidery in my hand, when *ma bonne* entered. She said nothing, only gazed at me with a steady, reproachful glance. My pretended unconsciousness was at an end, I dropped the work and covering my face with my apron burst into tears. This relieved my heart, which was oppressed with a double burden, my disobedience and the knowledge that, though unintentionally, I had listened to the conversation.

How gladly I would have made a frank confession, but some vague feeling that it would be painful for her to learn that I had heard things not intended for my ears, restrained me.

She reserved her reproof, till I was calm, then they came all the more abundantly. Among other things she said Valérian would lose his respect for me, if I did not know how to maintain my own dignity—I shook my head. I really don't know how to behave with dignity—and what has his respect to do with an evening ride?

OCTOBER. 15th.

I no longer walk, I dance for joy. Papa has not re-

tracted his promise, it is settled, positively settled, that I am to be married on Valérian's birthday. At first I was doubtful and wouldn't believe it, but the preparations now being made convinced me. Valérian and I fairly suffocated *ma bonne* with kisses and caresses, when she told us of the consent. In the excitement her spectacles were broken, which made her very angry. She was so comical in her indignation! Our caresses had pushed her cap awry, and one of the false braids she wears on each side of her face was pulled down and dangled like a rat's tail—how we laughed! The house is full of bustle, two dressmakers will come from Moscow to prepare my toilettes, none of our seamstresses are skilful enough to be trusted with my wedding dress—! My wedding dress. How pleasantly that sounds! For the first time I shall hear the rustle of satin, I have never even worn silk; it must be delightful to draw a long glittering train after one. I shall wear the pearl necklace Valérian gave me, and a delicate lace veil, transparent as a cloud, will conceal my whole figure. Mamma had it, and *ma bonne* is very unwilling to have me wear it on that day—she sees bad omens everywhere, and is terribly superstitious, though she neither prays to the Mother of God nor the saints—but I am to have my way. Such a costly veil, no princess need be ashamed of it. It would be foolish to let it grow yellow in the trunk.

A marriage is the most important event in a human life! Even papa seems to be anxious to have nothing

wanting on this occasion, he has invited a number of people, both from the neighboring estates and Moscow. Whole wagon loads of wines, and dainties are ordered, *ma bonne*, it is true, grumbles : who is to pay for all this, but I find it very pleasant that people should try to make my marriage day a festal one.

Since I have known I shall soon be Valerian's wife, I am not so shy, a short time ago I threw my arms around papa's neck and thanked him for his kindness. He was actually amazed and raising my face, said :

"Why, little one, you are really getting red cheeks and bright eyes, you have become a pretty little witch." Yesterday he came into the room with a letter in his hand, looking more excited and pleased, than I have ever seen him.

"Irinuschka," he said, "you can't guess what a distinction is in store for you."

"I was curious to learn what it could be.

"His excellency, Count W. will do us the honor to attend your wedding."

"Oh! will he?" I answered, surprised, and confused, the presence of such a distinguished man could only embarrass me.

Ma bonne's face wore a peculiar expression, she was not particularly edified by the honor.

"What brings *him* here?" she asked, with a tolerably strong emphasis on the *him* "as far as I know, he has never crossed your threshold."

Papa drew himself up proudly. There is nothing strange about the matter. Be kind enough not to forget, that when a young man, I served in the Guard, and rose to the rank of captain. But for that, I could not have been made *marechal de noblesse*, as in our country as you are aware, not noble birth, but military rank renders a man eligible to a post of honor."

"Yes, yes," she replied, "I've heard of it, here too you have taken pattern from the Chinese."

He continued :

"I was a colonel in the same regiment in which Count W. served as a lieutenant—he rose very rapidly—"

"Of course," muttered *ma bonne*, "he resembled a Hercules, and that pleased the noble sovereign—*guel horreur !*"

She took a pinch of snuff from the box and sneezed violently.

"He rose very rapidly," papa repeated, "was loaded with wealth and orders, and as I soon sent in my resignations, our intercourse ceased. Last year the count bought a large estate with a thousand serfs in our district, the intendant is my friend, and through him I learned that His Excellency intended to come and inspect his new purchase this month. It is directly in his way, as he is obliged to pass through Moscow on his return from Taurus, where he has been fighting against the Turks."

"Against the unbelievers!" I said shuddering. The

horrors perpetrated at the storming of Otschkoo are still fresh in every mind."

"Yes indeed, he hacked the beasts to pieces at Fokrichan, the victory is attributed to his heroic courage."

I felt a horror of this blood stained wedding guest.

"I took the liberty of sending through the intendant, an invitation to his Excellency, which he graciously accepted. Rejoice, Irinia, he'll certainly bring you some magnificent present, perhaps a piece of jewelry, there is said to have been rare booty in the Turkish camp."

I did not rejoice, and *ma bonne* also seemed secretly anxious, although she said no more about the distinguished guest. I could not shake off the thought of him and looked forward to his arrival with mingled dread and expectation. His warlike deeds are praised, he is said to be a great hero! The word calls up images of bloody cruelties—I imagine him on horseback, waving his sword, rushing over a field strewn with corpses, the heads of the enemies he has slain hanging as terrible trophies at his saddle bow—I have probably seen some wood cut of this character, which has made a deep impression on my imagination.

So such deeds excited the admiration of mankind—were they not unworthy of a Christian!

Hitherto, no doubt of the justice of the arrangement of worldly affairs had ever arisen in my mind; when *ma bonne* spoke bitterly of the inequality of position, the unjust division of property, I had often endeavored to

argue against her views. Of course these attempts were a pitiable failure. I told her I thought every one must have his appointed sphere, as there were large and insignificant trees, so there must be higher and lower classes among men. Each must remain in the position where God placed him—Our serfs are often ill treated, when they have bad masters, but really hard hearted masters are the exception. If these in experienced, childish people were left to themselves, they would feel more unhappy than under the strictest rule.

To me the world appeared admirably arranged and governed, to wish to improve and overturn it I thought unjust and wrong. For the first time the imperfect side appeared—Why did the Empress make war upon the Turk? To conquer land and increase her power. True, the people butchered at Otschakoo were heathen, but were they not creatures whom God had made, and if He suffered them to remain on earth had men a right to destroy them with fire and sword? Why did God allow these terrible things to happen? Now I had reached a point beyond which I could not pass. *Ma bonne* had no satisfactory answer to give me, she is very skeptical in everything relating to religion, never accompanies me to mass, and during Lent is always trying to persuade me to eat meat—I am convinced, that in her heart she mocks at our holy rites. She often says: if she were *le bon Dieu*, she would shut her eyes and ears. that she might neither see or hear what nappened on this miserable earth—“and

He does so too," she usually added, "He doesn't trouble Himself about us, so each must take care of himself."

I am sorry she has so little piety, and it grieves me that I cannot unite with her in prayer. I often think—but it is a terrible thought, which I scarcely dare confess—she believes in nothing, she doesn't even show the least reverence for the church and the saints, and yet she is so kind and good, her whole life is one chain of self sacrifice. True, she doesn't ask much about heaven, but her deeds must be written there in characters of light.

It occurred to me, that the priest might be able to give some explanation of this contradiction. I rarely visit Father Spiridon in his own house; his wife the popoda, * as *ma bonue* scornfully calls her, is very good-natured, but a careless housekeeper. The house might be much neater, their guest room is always filled with a penetrating odor of spoiled kwas, which makes it impossible for me to stay there more than half an hour. A headache is the invariable consequence of a visit to these worthy people: I conquered my repugnance and went there day before yesterday. The little house stands beside the church and as papa won't repair it, is dilapidated and ruinous. Father Spiridon opened the door himself, but started back in surprise when he saw me, and hastily glided away calling his wife. He had braided his long hair in countless little strands, that it might look wavy the next day, when he said mass—it was naturally very

* The priests of the greek church are allowed to marry once—Tr.

stiff and straight. He was confused, when I surprised him in making such preparation, and he disappeared to unbraid them.

Anna Mtonovna came in his place and insisted on my entering the guest room. She wore a dirty brown calico dress, over which she had fastened a woolen shawl and a knit cap. I was forced to sit down on the horsehair sofa, and she took her place opposite, with her arms wrapped in her shawl, and her head bent mournfully aside.

“How do you do, Irinia Stepanovna?”

I assured her that the state of my health left nothing to be desired. After a pause, which she had filled with suppressed sighs, she inquired about my father's health, and after another pause, repeated the same question in relation to *ma bonne*. I made courteous replies, to which she listened with a resigned smile. Then she thoughtfully rubbed her thick nose, raised her eyes to the cracked ceiling, from which the plaster had fallen, and said with a significant emphasis :

“Ah! Irinia Stepanovna, these are terrible times!”

Before I could make any response to this exclamation, she continued with amazing volubility :

“The serfs daily become worse and worse, it's shameful how they haggle and bargain. The Starosta had a child baptized a few weeks ago—just think, Irinia Stepanovna, his wife bought a silver chain and silk ribbons at the last fair, the master ought not to allow such extravagance. So I said to my husband : You know this is the Starosta's

first child, we must do him some honor, put on your yellow silk robe—The yellow silk robe, the best we possess, for a Mujik in sheepskin! I thought he would pay a respectable sum—what do you suppose he laid on the table? Five silver kopecks, nothing more! And he is the richest man in the village, so you can imagine what the others give. Oh! what a stingy set, they no longer have any respect for our holy religion.”

In her zeal she had gesticulated violently with her bare arms, now she again wrapped them in her shawl and resumed her former melancholy attitude.

Father Spiridon's entrance relieved me from the duty of pitying his dear Anna Mtonovna, she left the room, saying mournfully, that poor as was the household, she would at least take the liberty of offering me a dish of cooked fruit. Father Spiridon had red hands—like most priests—and I always wondered, when I saw him looking so cross and commonplace in every day life, how he could seem so dignified and majestic at mass. The Holy Ghost probably descended upon him, ennobling and irradiating the earthly husk.

After welcoming me, he coughed and spit, and then sat down on a wooden stool.

“You are very condescending, Irinia Stepanovna,” he remarked in his deep, hoarse bass voice. Then he cleared his throat violently, coughed behind his hand and waited for me to continue the conversation.

I at first felt embarrassed, and as I sat opposite to my

spiritual adviser, clearly perceived that he would never give me a satisfactory answer and dispel my doubts.

“Why does God allow so much wrong to be done on earth?” I asked suddenly, without any introduction.

Father Spiridon gazed at me with a puzzled look, to see if I were in earnest—such a question had probably never been addressed to him. He shook his head.

“That is hard to say, Barischin,* who can fathom divine, wisdom? It must be for some good purpose, or it would not be, we ought not to rack our brains too much.”

He had never done so, I felt sure. No, why should I ask him to explain things, which were far beyond his mental horizon. But I would make an attempt.

“The Holy Scriptures say:” Thou shall not kill, is not war therefore a sin?”

“It depends upon circumstances,” replied the priest cautiously, “when the cursed Swedes attacked us, they committed an abominable sin, and were punished by a humiliating defeat, at Poltava there is a high hill composed solely of their bones.”

“And is the Turkish war pleasing to God?”

“Certainly, certainly!” he eagerly exclaimed, “our august Czarina wages it to protect the Christians languishing under the yoke of unbelievers.”

I looked at him doubtfully.

* Mistress

“And do the cruelties practised on defenceless women and children also come under the head of religion?”

Father Spiridon hemmed and glanced askance at me from under his bushy brows, he evidently feared I was laying a snare for him.

“You think too much, Irinia Stepanvona, you are a philosopher,” said he I could not help laughing, *ma bonne* reproached me on exactly opposite grounds, she called me a weather-cock and *tête ecervele*.

“I know nothing about philosophy, but I should like to be able to decide between right and wrong, and thinking you could tell me from the Holy Scriptures, I came to you instead of applying to Valérian Maxinitsch. You have heard of Field Marshal Count W., who is one of the bravest, but also the cruelest of our generals, in Otschakov he ordered his troops to fire a Mosque, to which hundreds of women and children had fled—the unfortunates shrieked in vain for mercy, they all perished—Must we not abhor such monsters? Would you give him, the executioner, the holy communion?”

“How could I refuse to give such a distinguished nobleman the communion,” exclaimed the old man, almost in terror; “the Metropolitan himself would scarcely venture to do so, let alone a poor insignificant country priest.”

I sighed, the scorn with which *ma bonne* spoke of the world, its prejudices and inconsistencies, was only too well founded. There was really a different morality for

the aristocratic and powerful. I went away without having tasted the cooked fruit prepared by the priest's wife, the spoon was dirty and seemed no cleaner, after Anna Mtonovna had breathed upon it and rubbed it with the corner of her handkerchief, besides I had no appetite.

Ma bonne sat on the high window sill in my room busily engaged in sewing. Her work was a fine dressing gown intended for me, our seamstresses had done the embroidery during the winter under her direction. Her eyes are weak, but with spectacles she can see the tiniest stitches and no one makes them so regularly. She answered my greeting with a friendly nod, but did not interrupt her work. I laid aside my wadded cloak and white hood, and standing in the middle of the room gazed thoughtfully at my old friend. She was really very old, I noticed it particularly to-day, and yet she gave herself no rest day or night.

I knelt on the floor at her feet and threw my arms around her.

"What do you want?" she asked, tenderly stroking my hair.

"When you are in my house—I blushed at the words it seemed so strange that I should soon have a house of my own—you must n't work, Valérian and I won't allow it; I shall then be the mistress who will direct and arrange everything, you shall sit in an arm chair and let us take care of you. French newspapers and books shall

be sent you from Moscow every month, and your only occupation will be to read them."

She wiped her spectacles, which had grown dim. You are good children, she said in agitated tone, "when you are happily married, I shall have nothing more to desire on earth. *Monsieur Valerien* has a tender, loving heart, with him you will lead a happy life. I daily thank the kind fate that brought him to you, he has inherited the noble nature of his mother, who was *une femme d'elite*. Only he ought to be somewhat more manly and independent."

"Do you think so?" I answered in surprise. To me my lover seemed the ideal of manly courage and pride.

I had laid my head in her lap, and now looked up at her with an incredulous smile. She gently pinched my ear and answered in a jesting tone:

"You wouldn't have him different, little one, I know you couldn't love him more under any circumstances, even if angels wings suddenly grew from his shoulders."

"Certainly," I eagerly replied, hastily starting up, "I love him unspeakably, just as he is—I'll tell you something," I whispered nestling close to her side, "you must tell me whether such thoughts are awful—you see God might demand any sacrifice of me—but if I were robbed of Valérian, if I should lose him—I would not bear it—" I started up with flashing eyes—"I would struggle against the whole world, even against Heaven. I feel, that if this terrible thing should happen, my faith, my religion would

be at an end, I could not pray to such a cruel pitiless God."

"Child," said *ma bonne*, taking my hands and drawing me towards her," do not excite yourself, you are trembling and have grown deadly pale. No one will interfere between you and him, in a week you will be united forever. How long has your little head cherished such rebellious thoughts!"

"I scarcely know, you first suggested them by your tales of the wonderful changes in Paris, where the great majority, weary of sufferings and sacrifices, took the law into their own hands—"

"*Le tiers etat*, to which I also belong," she interposed.

"At first it didn't seem right, because I thought only of our ignorant, idle population, but now, when I daily witness the reverence with which papa speaks of this Count W. it has become plain to me, that each person has some superior, and my pride would rebel against being oppressed. We are free nobles, why must we consider it such an honor to have this count, who reeks of human blood, enter our house? I no longer look forward with pleasure to our wedding day, because it seems as if the presence of this man would cast a shadow over our young happiness."

"And Stepan Petrovitsch's brains have been turned topsy turvy, ever since he has had His barbarous Excellency's acceptance of the invitation in his pocket. Nothing is good enough for him, he has tormented me more

during these few days, than in all the former years I have lived here, and that's saying a great deal. He would willingly lie on his Excellency's threshold as a foot scraper—that's a type of your pitiable country; servile to superiors, inhuman and brutal to those of lower rank."

Ma bonne often uses exaggerated expressions, I think it is a peculiarity of the French character. She avoids speaking of papa to me, except when she has just had a scene with him then she cannot control herself and gives free course to her wrath.

"His Excellency will stand here and sit there, the Count will eat here and drink there—*Dieu me benisse!* There is nothing more to be said, than His Excellency will condescend to yawn here and sneeze there."

I laughed, perhaps that was what she intended to make me do.

"The fact that it is your wedding, which is to be solemnized, has been almost forgotten. Poor child, even this day will be darkened to you. I shall bless the moment, when *Monsieur Valerien* lifts you into the carriage and drives away with you."

"And you too?" I answered quickly.

"Oh! no," she replied, "it wouldn't do for me to leave the house I have kept for years, in confusion."

Everything must first be washed and cleaned and returned to its former condition—how it looks afterwards is'nt my affair."

"So I am to go to Malinovka alone with Valérian?"

Of course, you will then be his wife and need no other protection than your husband's."

So this constituted the whole difference. It was incomprehensible to me, how one day, no, a single hour could produce such a change. What *ma bonne* had hitherto condemned as improper, would then be perfectly right and natural.

Winter is at hand. When I rose this morning and drew back my window curtain, the ground was white, perfectly white. There had been a frost and this frost robbed the trees of their last ornament, the yellow leaves that still clung to the branches, fell slowly one after another to the cold, damp earth. The ice-coated boughs sparkled and glittered in the sunlight like diamonds. A silver veil seemed to have been spread over the thin, dry grass, even the dilapidated walls of the house had received a shining covering. Yes, nature is a great artist, she invests even ruin and decay with a magic charm. The change from autumn to winter always makes me melancholy. It is the loss of warmth and sunlight I deplore. *Ma bonne* once, a long time ago—she is now very old, probably about sixty—when she still lived in her native land went to Provence. Whenever in the Geography lesson we spoke of France, which was always the case, she, eagerly described the charms of the South, how the air in the winter was always soft and mild, how the mountains were adorned with changeless verdure, and

how on the coldest days people could sit out on the terraces in front of their houses.

I should like to live under such a sky, to be always surrounded by flowers and foliage, it must beautify life! I never feel this longing more strongly, than when I see the harbinger of our long winter. Oh! these storms, which howl around the house at night, how they groan and shriek, as if they bore on their wings the wails of the travelers, who have lost their way on the barren, inhospitable steppes, and meet their death under masses of snow and hail stones. I cannot sleep, in imagination I see the unfortunates struggle, the wearied horses stand still with lowered heads, awaiting their fate, the whirling dance of the white flakes, hear the whistling and howling of the tempest, as it triumphantly throws a pall over the caravan and the lonely travelers. Terrible images which I cannot dispel throng upon me. How often I start up and run bare footed into the next room, where *ma bonne* sleeps, nestle close to her, and cover my ears with both hands. She scolds me gently for my childish fear, but wraps me carefully in the bed-clothes and makes room for me beside her. On awaking I am surprised not to find myself in my bed, and *ma bonne*, who has risen long before and attended to her household duties, calls me a little goose, who is afraid of ghosts.

But it will be different now! Autumn will no longer seem sad, the lightest, happiest thoughts will be connected with this season of the year—day after to-morrow will be

my wedding day, and the anniversary of this day will shed light and warmth on the coldest winter, so long as Valérian and I live. I hope there are many, many years allotted to us, we are so sure they will bring only joy.

I have never yet been able to tell him how deeply, how warmly I love him ; I have often meant to do so, but when I stood before him the words faltered on my tongue, I was overwhelmed with confusion, as if I were about to commit some impropriety and could not speak. Perhaps I shall be able to express myself better, when I am his wife.

Lost in thought I leaned out of the window, unheeding the keen morning air, that reddened my cheeks. *Ma bonne* put her head cautiously in at the door, she supposed I was still asleep.

“How careless, Irene, to sit at the window in your thin night-dress such a cold morning. Do you want to be sick ? This would be just the right time for it.”

I replied that I had merely opened the window, to see if Valérian were coming, he had promised to ride over early in the morning.

Ma bonne grew angry.

“And you are not ashamed to greet him with bare arms and shoulders and unbound hair ?”

I blushed, the night dress had slipped back from my neck and my hands and my braids hung in disorder around me. As I shut the window and wrapped myself in a shawl the maid handed me, I murmured, that of course

I should have vanished behind the curtains, as soon as I perceived the horseman in the distance. *Ma bonne* was appeased when she saw my confusion and shame, but gave me several warnings that a woman, even when married, must maintain a certain reserve, that her husband may not forget to honor the lady. As if I should ever be wanting in reserve! My cheeks burned at the thought.

Ma bonne dropped the subject, greatly to my relief, and began to dress my hair elaborately. I was to try on all my bridal finery that day, in order to have any necessary changes made in them. Little could be done with hair, it is too long and thick for the coiffure now in a fashion, which moreover my second mother has the good taste to think ugly. She has very excellent judgment. Valérien says she is an *artiste dans l'âme*, and he understands such things, for his travels in foreign countries have developed his appreciation of art. My hair was arranged in long braids fastened with filigree pins, an heirloom from my mother, in a coronet, long loose curls fell on my shoulders. I sat as still as a mouse, not daring to move, it was the foretaste of a solemn moment.

The dress, whose material has been furnished by the Moscow modiste, is of white satin with embroidered borders, the neck trimmed with Brussels lace. I held my breath when it was laced, the silk rustled under the maid's fingers, she had been obliged to wash her hands three times. Then the bridal veil was thrown over my head

and a few orange blossoms fastened in my hair. *Ma bonne* declared herself satisfied with the general effect, and led me before a mirror, that I might see myself. I must say I was very well pleased with my appearance, the train made me look much taller, the long dark curls that fell on the white satin gave me a peculiar expression, with the diadem of braids above my brow and my eyes sparkling with delight I seemed to myself almost like a princess.

As I looked at myself on all sides and admired the transparent veil, I could not help thinking that my dear mamma, whom I had never known, had worn it on her wedding day and that it would have been far happier, if her hands had arrayed me—this made me sad and I began to cry.

“Irene, *au nom de Dieu!* Tears must not fall upon the bridal veil!” exclaimed *Ma bonne* in a half startled, half sympathizing tone. She carefully wiped my face with her pocket handkerchief, just at that moment the door opened and Valérian appeared on the threshold, surprised and dazzled he remained motionless for a moment, then with a single bound reached my side and seizing my hands, covered them with passionate kisses.

“Irene, you are so beautiful, I never saw you look so lovely before!” He kissed the veil, the dress, he seemed ready to fall down and adore me.

I did not venture to move, lest I should disarrange my costly toilette, shy yet happy I stood stiff and straight

with outstretched arms, like a doll, in the middle of the room. Valérian had rushed in so impetuously, that *ma bonne* had had no time to keep him back; her indignation now burst out all the more violently.

"Monsieur!" she exclaimed in an angry tone, shaking him somewhat rudely, how long has it been the custom to rush into a lady's room like a madman? Go away at once! What right have you to defy fate, don't you know it is a bad omen for a bridegroom to see his bride in the wreath and veil, except at the altar?"

He was still kneeling before me, her anger made very little impression upon him, he smilingly raised his handsome, joyous face and answered saucily:

"I have another interpretation of the omen, *Madame*, it means that a man sees Heaven open before him, ere he enters."

I stooped and pressed my lips on his fair, waving hair, which gleamed like gold in the sunlight.

"Turn your back upon the unmannerly fellow, Irene besides he is crushing your dress unmercifully *Allez-vous en, monstre.*"

Ma bonne pushed him out of the door without ceremony, and silently removed my wreath and the various articles of my dress, she was seriously angry. I coaxed her not to be cross, Valérian had done nothing wrong; after searching for me everywhere in vain, it was excusable that he had come to my room.

"I'm not superstitious, my child, *Dieu merci!* I be-

long to a country which has produced a Voltaire and Diderot," she said with a certain solemnity, "but there are things that should not be touched. The wreath and veil are not merely articles of dress, they are symbols; therefore no stranger's eye, least of all the bridegroom's, should see them in advance. When such a thing does happen, we believe the couple will never be united."

These gloomy forebodings did not startle me, I was too happy; I heard Valérian, who was impatiently awaiting me, whistle under my window. We had intended to seek every spot that was associated with our love, to-morrow there would be no time to do so, because some of the guests would arrive. I hastily buttoned my fur trimmed kasaveika and embracing *ma bonne*, answered confidently :

"You will be convinced that your superstitious fears—yes indeed, superstitious, in spite of Voltaire and Diderot—" I said with a mischievous emphasis, are groundless. I ask you how it would be possible for the wedding not to take place? The roasting and baking are already going on, the house is full of odors from the kitchen, the priest has been summoned, the witnessess invited, papa has consented, unless the sky falls, I can think of no obstacle. Even the count's presence no longer disturbs me, he won't trouble himself much about an insignificant bride and bridegroom, as we shall appear in his eyes. I shall look down when he speaks to me, that I may not see his fierce contenance "

She forced a smile, that did not come from her heart, wrapped a shawl around my head and neck—for which purpose she was obliged to stand on a stool, as I am much the taller of the two—and said :

“I’ll be no raven to destroy your youthful courage by my croaking, it is natural for old age to distrust fate. Fly away, my little bird, Valérian is calling still more urgently.”

When, breathless from running, I reached Valérian, he caught me in his arms and held me in a close embrace.

“How your heart beats,” he whispered tenderly, “you ought not to excite yourself so, remember what a fragile flower you are.”

I clung to his arm and with downcast eyes listened to the thousand loving words he lavished upon me, as we wandered through the large, deserted garden. The yellow leaves rustled under our feet, crimson vines twined around the trunks of the bare trees, illumined by the sun, they looked like fiery garlands. The frost had melted in the increasing warmth of the day, drops of moisture trickled slowly from the boughs, now and then falling on our foreheads, as we walked under the densely interlaced branches. Nothing green was visible except the sombre pines and the box which enclosed the walks. White filaments fluttered from the hawthorn bushes, the birds were silent, no butterflies hovered in the air, nature was preparing to sleep. But our gay laughter rang out

like joyous Spring. Valérian twisted a crimson vine in my hair and told me, what I was never weary of hearing, that as a boy he had loved me fondly, that my image had accompanied him everywhere, and its magic power rendered him indifferent to all other beauty. I sat down on the stone curb of a fountain, which had long been dry ; it was a lonely, desolate spot. All sorts of grass and weeds grew in the basin, the Neptune that had once hurled aloft the jet of water had lost his trident, his arms were missing, rain and snow had cruelly maltreated him, he looked almost black, so weather beaten was the stone.

The yew hedges around, no longer clipped, grew in tangled luxuriance in every direction and pressed close around the basin, as if they wished to imprison the old sea god. The noon day sun shone on this sheltered spot and warmed the stone ; a brownish lizard glided out of a chink, not with dainty nimbleness, but idly and feebly, as if already under the spell of winter. The warmth had probably tempted it out for the last time, it crept close to me and its little eyes seemed to look at me sadly, as if to say : you and I both mourn for the beautiful short summer. I did not move, lest I should frighten the little creature ; Valérian, who had thrown himself at my feet, rested his head on his arm and watched it as intently as I.

We were silent for some time, only our eyes spoke, like the lizard I basked in the pleasant warmth of the

sun; my friend had taken my hand and held it pressed to his lips, no sound was audible, now and then a withered leaf fluttered slowly to the ground—there was no other token of life.

Nothing unusual happened during the hour spent by the old fountain, we said nothing new or clever, saw and heard nothing, that would make an impression on the memory, yet it seems to me as if I shall never forget it. There was such a divine feeling of perfect satisfaction, perfect happiness, as I sat there quietly in the sunlight, with Valérian at my feet, his eyes fixed upon me with an expression of the most ardent, tender love, and the yew walls dividing us from the rest of the world.

When we went away, the lizard was still lying on the stone. “One could swear it was following you with its melancholy gaze,” said Valerian, “you have charmed it, as you do everything that approaches you.”

I turned—it did not stir, and I too thought it was looking at me.

In the afternoon *ma bonne* asked in a tone of gentle reproach, if I did not intend to go and take leave of my mother's grave? I had not been so heartless as to forget it, but merely deferred the act of filial piety, that the quiet, solemn mood it would produce might not be dispelled by the bustle that pervaded the household. Late in the afternoon we went to the churchyard. Valérian has told me how affectionately these gardens of the dead are tended in foreign countries—with us they are melan-

choly places, it grieves me that my dear mamma, who was so refined and gentle, should sleep in such a neglected, desolate spot. The church yard is not enclosed, a few stones thrown together pass for a wall, which is so low and full of holes, that it does not afford the slightest protection. Dogs, pigs, geese have chosen it for their favorite resort, the earth is everywhere turned up, most of the tasteless crosses are overthrown; no one takes any care of the graves, there is not a tree, a flower, a blade of grass, nothing but a mass of dirt and rubbish. Mamma is said to have wished to be buried in our garden, instead of here, I don't know why the request was not fulfilled, I believe the church entered a protest.

Ma bonne and I have vainly endeavored to give her grave a pleasant aspect; without shade, exposed to the full power of the sun, every flower withered, the seeds would not grow in the dry earth. The only thing that could be done was to put a fence around the mound, that it might at least be protected from animals. I always feel oppressed when I enter this spot—after we have enjoyed our bright, happy life and rejoiced in the air and sunlight, we shall be thrust into the ground to sleep until the resurrection. How short the waking, and how long the sleep! What has life given my poor mamma? Nothing but disappointment and sorrow, and when she pressed to her heart a child, who might have afforded her some consolation, death, without pity for her youth and beauty, snatched her away. Who can

tell how this injustice is to be made good? By heavenly joys? I can form no idea of them, and yet religion requires that the prospect of them shall enable us to bear and suffer everything—These are sinful thoughts again, I'll confess them to Father Spiridon, he won't understand them, it is true, but he will grant me absolution.

I knelt beside the grave and prayed, prayed fervently to my dear mamma, imploring her to bless me and Valérian. It seemed to me as if she must hear my voice, I felt so near her, and I involuntarily listened for an answer. It was growing dark, the grave stones cast long shadows, twilight was already spreading its grey veil over the earth, the daws screamed around the dome of the church, bats glided by. I leaned on Valérian's arm, he dried the tears which flowed incessantly, and said that he vowed by the sleeper resting there, to make my happiness his sole object, that he would never forget I was weaker and more delicate, and therefore it would be his most sacred duty to cherish me.

A fine rain began to trickle down, the moisture collected in beads on our clothes, faces, and hair. Valérian said it was time to return, he feared I should get chilled. I crossed myself and kissed the earth which contained the mortal remains of my mother, he had thrown himself beside me, to mingle his prayers with mine.

"Come, Irene," he said, throwing his arm around me and drawing me away with gentle violence. We closed the little gate, whose key I held; I shivered, indescrib-

able desolation and dreariness brooded over the spot. A feeling of dread suddenly took possession of me, it seemed as if there was a movement among the sunken graves, the mouldering wooden crosses, I fancied I saw shadowy forms in the mist—"Let us go, let us go," I whispered timidly. We turned away—just at that moment Valérian felt something hold his cloak.

"It is the hand of the dead, she wants to draw you into the grave, I will not let you go!" I shrieked in terror, clinging to him. He tried to soothe me, but his own voice sounded unsteady, and I saw in his face, that he too could not resist an unpleasant impression.

In closing the gate a corner of his cloak had been caught, we were obliged to open it again to release it. The incident had a perfectly natural explanation, yet the first ghostly impression lingered, and I still think of it with terror. We walked silently to the house, and the noisy bustle that greeted us there formed a striking contrast to our mood. Perhaps it was fortunate, that we were obliged to mingle with others, or the whole evening would have passed very sorrowfully. Several carriages filled with guests had arrived and *ma bonne* had her hands full to provide for them and their servants. All were papa's friends and acquaintances, but total strangers to me, as he never took me with him when paying visits in the neighborhood. I can't say I like them; the older men had loud voices and a coarse laugh, the manners of the younger ones were more polished, among them

were several officers—sons of land owners—who were stationed in Moscow and St Petersburg, but their conduct was equally unpleasant. The conversation they carried on with the other ladies and with me was unexpressibly insipid and commonplace, and I did not understand the innuendoes at which the others often burst into shouts of laughter. There was not one of the young girls whom I should have wished to choose for a friend, they all seemed extremely ignorant and uncultured. Dressed with the utmost want of taste and overloaded with finery, they moved stiffly and awkwardly, it was evident that they were ill at ease in these showy toilettes, because unaccustomed to them. They scanned me from head to foot with the boldest glances.

“Why are you so simply dressed?” they asked contemptuously, “**you** don’t look at all like a bride. And your hair isn’t powdered! Don’t you know what is the fashion?”

I replied that *ma bonne* always chose my dresses, and that I thought powder very ugly because it concealed the natural color of the hair. They put their heads together and whispered, I thought I caught the words: silly goose. Then a tall, stout girl, with a ruddy complexion and broad cheeks, said:

“I hear you are very learned, Irene Stepanovna, you speak French and paint. We can’t do that, we are very stupid and simple, but we know how to cook, make cake, etc, in a word, we are good housekeepers.”

I was bewildered—why were they so unkind to me I had done them no harm, and couldn't help being unlike them. So I answered timidly, I hoped I too should be able to keep my house in order, and what I did not know I would try to learn.

“Only don't work too hard, you're a tender little doll and can't do much with your tiny hands.”

“Those hands are only meant to be kissed,” said a young gentleman joining in the conversation and looking at me with piercing eyes. I blushed under the gaze whose boldness annoyed me. The tall girl, with fat red fingers, and she had squeezed them into such small gloves, that the seams had burst. One young girl had a pleasanter expression than the others; I took her arm and walked up and down the hall with her. She was a year younger than I and also betrothed, her wedding was to take place very soon.

“Has your lover given you a doll too?” she asked.

I looked at her in astonishment, I had not played with dolls since I was twelve years old.

“Mine brought me a splendid one from Moscow, just think, she is dressed like a lady and can open and shut her eyes. I fairly jumped for joy when she came and insisted upon taking her to bed with me. At my wedding she'll sit on a chair beside me. If you'll promise not to betray me, I'll tell you a secret—I love the doll far better than my betrothed husband.”

I hesitated a moment and then said: Do you know,

Varvara Pavlovna, if I were in your place, I would play with dolls as long as I liked them and be married afterwards."

"What an idea!" she answered laughing, "my mother married when she was fourteen—am I to be an old maid?"

I made no reply, we should not have understood each other. What strange people there are in the world, and how few there are like Valérian and *ma bonne*.

While writing, I fell asleep with my head on the table, I was so tired, I should be wiser to go to bed, for to-morrow will be a tiresome day, as *ma bonne* says; but the short nap has refreshed me wonderfully. I feel as if I could sit up till morning. *Ma bonne* doesn't give herself any rest, I hear her moving continually about in her room and speaking in low tones to the maid servants, she is afraid of disturbing me, because she imagines I am sound asleep.—I had a few lines to write in my journal—I shall spend only one more night in this room, which I have occupied ever since mamma died and I was placed here, where *ma bonne* could watch every breath, every cry. I have passed seventeen years in this room, and they have been very pleasant ones; but for my fear of papa, and a few violent scenes which took place between him and my dear governess, I shall have only happy memories of these days. My nature is not prone to noisy mirth, but quiet cheerfulness, if I am to feel really happy, I must be surrounded by love and peace.

And for this my dear second mother toiled with unwearied devotion, she would have liked to pack me in cotton-wool like a little bird, that no breeze might visit me too roughly. Where shall I be at the end of seventeen years more? What an eternity it seems, and how divine is the thought that I shall spend each one of these thousands of days with Valérian! I wonder if every girl on the eve of her wedding is as happy and as secure of the future as I!

Most of the guests have retired. A muffled noise rises from the billiard room, where the gentlemen are lying about on benches, chairs, and tables—there were not rooms and beds enough for all. Some, papa among them, have not yet left the card table. He must have lost heavily, for the veins on his forehead were swollen, and his thick eyebrows frowned angrily. When I went to kiss his hand and bid him good night, he did not hear me; I waited patiently for him to turn—it was not a good idea, it would have been better for me to slip quietly away. His opponents were just sweeping up a pile of gold pieces—among them his seal ring—when he perceived me.

“Why do you stand behind my chair and drive away my luck with your gloomy eyes?” he angrily exclaimed. “Girls are only born to annoy us.”

“Our own girls, you mean,” interrupted a landowner with a disagreeable laugh, “other people’s daughters are often very pleasant.”

“My father joined in the laugh and giving me a pat on the shoulder, exclaimed :

“Run away, little wax doll, and don’t stare at us any longer, tell Axinia”—this was the housekeeper—“to send up the Hungarian wine with the yellow seal and some brandy.”

I hurried out of the room, I felt afraid of these drinking, wrangling men, whose faces were scarcely distinguishable through the cloud of tobacco smoke.

Valérian has returned to Malinovka for the last time. To-morrow he will come in a carriage he has bought for me, an English chaise, which I am very curious to see ; we have only an old fashioned clumsy coach, in which we can drive only a short distance, and an ordinary tarantass, which papa has for his journeys. I am not only curious to see the carriage, but also the house. Valérian has kept his arrangements a secret, that my surprise might be greater. I only know that he purchased the furniture, carpets, and curtains in Moscow. His taste is the best in the world, and he likes to be surrounded with pretty, comfortable things. In former days our house is said to have been also very elegant ; papa belongs to a family that once possessed great wealth, but the magnificence vanished long ago, no trace of it remains except a few pieces of silver and a white satin quilt, richly embroidered with gold and silver, which *ma bonne* kept for me with the veil.

My bridal finery lies outspread before me ; Parascha,

my maid, has spread a large cloth over it to protect it from the dust—it looks almost like a winding sheet. What a horrible comparison, yet it is an apt one. The more I look at it, the stronger the resemblance becomes.

To-morrow morning more guests will arrive, the young gentlemen are to act as Valérians groomsmen, he has no friends among them, only acquaintances. At twelve o'clock we are to dine and afterwards the dancing will begin. I am to dance in turn with all the gentlemen, Valérian with all the ladies. This will last until after midnight, for people are unwearied, when this pleasure has commenced. The musicians who are to play for us, are gipsies, it is said their tunes have power to lend wings to the slowest feet. I'm very fond of dancing, but I fear it will be no pleasure whirling about with mere strangers. The wedding is appointed to take place at eleven o'clock day after to-morrow; Valérian and his companions will drive straight to the church, I am to follow somewhat later with those who accompany me. Papa thinks His excellency, Count W., will do me the honor to give me away. I hope he will be too proud, such a distinguished gentleman will scarcely condescend to notice a simple little country girl.

After the ceremony is over we shall return to the house, where meantime a table will have been set; Valérian and I will sit down on the sofa and receive the congratulations of the guests, each of whom we must pledge in a glass of wine. This will be a hard task, for even if

I only sip a few drop each time, I shall have a terrible headache. After we have pledged the whole company and bowed to each other, we shall go in to dinner, and as the number of dishes is very large, the meal will be a long one. Then the dancing will begin again, in which, however, we shall have no share, we shall slip away, enter our carriage, and drive off. *Ma bonne* devised this plan, because she says I should certainly be ill if I were obliged to go through another tiresome evening. Valérian, to whom the noisy gayety is repulsive, agreed to this proposal with delight, as we shall slip away unobserved—to escape the indelicate jests and allusions, as *ma bonne* says.

If to-morrow were only over! I cannot join in this loud mirth; Valérian and I are both strangers in this circle of neighbors, who have come from a distance of sixty miles around; papa knows them all, and it seems as if our wedding were only a secondary consideration, the drinking, gambling and carousing the real object. I have led too solitary a life during my childhood, it is hard for me to conquer my diffidence. I had anticipated much pleasure from the society of the young girls. I thought we should laugh and talk together merely, but I perceive they look at me with serious glances, which betray no kind feelings. Why do they annoy me? I've not even put on the diamonds Valérian gave me, they belonged to his mother, my dear mother, and he merely had them reset. I shall feel sad when I adorn myself with them, and yet he wishes me to wear them.

Hark! What was that! What mournful sounds reach my ear—Oh Heaven—it was nothing, but I felt terribly startled—some one tapped on my window—I started up to rush to *ma bonne*, at the risk of depriving her of the sleep she so much needs—How childish I have been, at night the simplest things seem mysterious—the mind has risen and howls around the house, it dashed a branch against the window, that was all. Fortunately Valérian's nocturnal rides are now over, he could not continue them in such weather without danger to his health, even if nothing worse happened—I had wished to have the sun shine brightly on my wedding day—but it is not to be, the sky is covered with thick clouds, I just put my head out of the window, because I heard Rosza, my little dog, howling piteously. In vain I shaded my eyes to pierce the gloom—I could not distinguish the nearest objects. The whining and howling continued, I softly opened the door, before which my maid Parascha slept, to rouse her. She at last understood what I wanted, a long drawn howl from the dog completely enlightened her. She crossed herself.

“Oh! Barishin, Irinia Stepanovna, that's a bad sign Dogs howl in that way when there is a dead body in the house. Heaven preserve us from misfortune!”

Her superstitious fears infected me, in order not to remain alone, I accompanied her down stairs, we unlocked the door, which was a difficult task, as the wind pressed against us and admitted Rosza, who leaped upon

me with a joyous bark. I have been forbidden to let the dog sleep in my room, but I took him in. I was excited and worn out, it was a comfort to have some living creature near me. He has jumped on the bed and stretched himself on the quilt at the foot. I'll follow his example, it is time to stop writing.

How the wind howls !

Those are the same tones, that startled me when a child—I'll bury my head in the pillows and try to fall asleep at once—When I continue my journal, I shall be a wife, Valérian's wife, mistress of Malinovka !

NOTES BY THE OLD GOVERNESS.

(THREE YEARS LATER.)

St. Petersburg, 1793.

“Yes, I am still alive and my trembling fingers can guide a pen. The old Frenchwoman, *l' epouvantail*,’ as His Excellency chooses to call me, has a tough constitution, and as she is indispensable to the child she reared with so much love and care, will wait for death, though she longs to get away from this cruel, blood-stained world, where crime triumphs and baseness boldly lifts its head. To think that my eyes were forced to behold these things, while I had no weapons save burning tears and powerless curses. To-day the terrible events of that day again rose before my mind; I found in one of the wardrobes of this huge palace a shabby little trunk, which I dimly remember having brought with me, when thirty years ago I first trod the soil of this cold, savage country. It contained all my possessions; a poor lonely widow, forced to earn my bread among strangers, I had no superfluous articles of dress. I began to weep as I unfastened the shabby, leather straps—alas in those days, when still young and hopeful, I had thought that after

the lapse of a certain time I should pack my savings in this little trunk, and be able to return to my home—How different has been the result! I made the acquaintance of Irene's mother, my heart clung fondly to the gentle, lovable creature, I followed her to the Kudovka, received her last sigh, which sounded like an expression of gratitude that God had called her to Him, and vowed beside her lifeless body never to leave her child. I have kept my promise, as a dog will not allow kicks and blows to drive it from its master's threshold, so neither insults nor threats have been able to separate me from Irene. I watched over her in this pompous palace, as I did at Kudovka. Was there ever a harder, more thorny path than the one allotted to this young wife? I am surprised that she is still alive, that the terrible blow did not kill her on the spot. To be sure, what sort of life is it? That of an automaton, whose soul has been destroyed, even the instinct of maternal affection has cast no animating spark into this beautiful, lifeless form. I cannot help it—I love the little helpless creature, that lies deserted in its gilded cradle and vainly stretches out its little hands towards its mother. If I did not take pity upon it, the nurse would neglect it shamefully, she knows its life gives no one pleasure. Is it the child's fault, that its father is a monster? I said the same thing to Irene yesterday, when I carried little Tatiana to her and told her to notice how how straight she was and how her eyes sparkled. The young mother gazed at me

with a weary, hopeless look, and answered in a hollow tone :

Take her way—perhaps after a time I shall become accustomed to the thought of having a daughter. I wish her the best fate that can befall her—an early death, before she has passed the boundaries of childhood.”

The little thing, as if it had understood the meaning of the words, suddenly began to cry piteously, not noisily like a child, but in a low mournful tone, like a grown person. I carried it back to the large bare room, where the cradle seems lost, and soothed it with caressing.

As I unfastened the old trunk, a motley variety of articles fell out. I remembered, that in a half senseless condition I had collected and thrown in all sorts of things, which I thought Irene or I might need. Afterwards, when we reached St. Petersburg, the shabby little trunk was probably contemptuously thrust out of the way by some of the liveried servants, and I forgot it. I unpacked it with mournful curiosity ; there were underclothes belonging to Irene and myself, a miniature of her mother, a work bag, a Russian prayer book, a shabby copy of *Paul et Virginie*, and some hard object carefully wrapped in a cloth. What could it be ? I removed the cover and found—the casket which Valérian—my hand trembles as I write his name—had given his betrothed bride on her seventeenth birthday — *mon Dieu !* What memories arose ! I fell on my knees, every limb trembled, I gazed through a mist of tears at the delicate painting on the

lid, which the smiling happy girl had so rapturously admired : the white rose-bud bending on its delicate stalk above a grave stone. Yes, my gloomy forebodings did not deceive me—it has become a symbol of Irene. Like the white rose she droops her beautiful head, her happiness, her youth sleep in a grave and will never be restored. A worm is gnawing at this sweet flower, it continues its work of destruction invisibly, soon she too will fade—

I opened the casket—there on the red velvet cushion lay the pearl necklace, which had been intended to adorn the betrothed bride. Was I not right in saying people should not wear these petrified, frozen tears on such a day? Alas, how all the vague, shapeless forebodings, that haunted and tortured me, have been fulfilled.

In the lower part of the casket I found a book—why had I placed it there? Did it contain anything so important? I could not yet remember why I had preserved these crushed, worn pages. It was Irene's journal, the sweet innocent thoughts she had confided to paper; that was her flowing graceful hand, so clear and legible. I glanced over the contents, though it cut me to the heart to follow her life, step by step, up to the final catastrophe—

I dare not return the book to her, the sight of it would cause an outburst of despair, which I should be powerless to soothe. It might kill her. True, death would be a happy release, but I will not be the instru-

ment to deal the blow. I must not undertake the rôle of Providence. I put the casket in a cupboard, whose key I always carry, and laid the volume in a portfolio, which can also be locked. When Irene, magnificently dressed as befits her rank but cold and pale as marble, drives out to some entertainment, from which she always returns with a still more desolate heart, I will secretly endeavor in my quiet room, to complete her journal, that the child, whose existence gives no one pleasure, whose entrance into the world has been greeted by no tender smile, may one day learn why its mother could not love it. I shall probably not live long enough to tell the story, so the pen must speak for me. My eyes and hand are weak, for I have become a feeble old woman and can no longer see anything without spectacles, but I will try to make my writing legible—the task I have to perform is a sacred one.

So I will take up the thread of the story, where Irene dropped it, namely on the day preceding the wedding.

The morning was dark and gloomy; a storm had risen during the night, and the sky was obscured by heavy clouds, which discharged their contents in gusts of cold rain mingled with snow flakes. Irene confessed that she had slept very little; in many respects she was a mere child, one cause of which was doubtless her extremely delicate, nervous constitution. She shrank from any conflict of the elements, as she trembled before outbursts of anger, and no long period had elapsed since

she buried her head in my lap and closed her ears, whenever a tempest was raging. So although she had not rested as well as I desired—for I alone know what care she requires—she looked like a dewy rose, when she entered my room. I was again dazzled by her beauty, and my admiration is totally impartial. Her figure might serve as the model for a Hebe, her skin is smooth as satin and transparent as the petal of a lily, her hands and feet are the most delicate that can be imagined, and the sweet face with its large dark eyes, the graceful head with its wealth of silken hair rest on the slender neck like a flower. Fortunately the rude land owners, who lived like bears on the steppes and in the forests, did not appreciate this ideal beauty ; stout, large-boned girls, with cheeks as red as tiles, who allowed themselves to be petted by coarse hands, pleased them better. Thank God that it was so ! I blessed their blindness and stupidity. My darling had forgotten the terrors of the night, she laughed and talked merrily while I combed and braided her hair, which I could only do by standing on a stool, for she had outstripped me in hight long ago. Now and then she glanced out of the window and said sorrowfully :

“ My poor Valérian, what a disagreeable drive he will have ! How fortunate that he is in a close carriage, or the bridegroom would arrive dripping wet. I’m very curious to see the vehicle, it is said to have been built in England and rests on springs, which prevent any jolt.

Don't you think, *petite maman*, that that is a very useful invention for our horrible roads?"

While talking she turned her head now towards me, now towards the window, I scolded her a little and said I could not arrange her hair neatly if she didn't sit still.

"Nobody must look cross to day," she cried laughing, with an affectionate embrace. She had a tender heart, and not even her lover made her forget her old friend. During the early days of their betrothal, Monsieur Valérien, whose intellect was as keen and vivacious as if he were a Frenchman instead of a Muscovite, teased me about keeping Irene in leading strings; she probably feared I might feel hurt, for she threw both arms around me and said in a tone of grave reproach: "Consider that *ma bonne* has older rights to my love, I shall not only never cease to be her daughter, but bring you to her as an affectionate son. And *Monsieur Valerian* always behaved like one. He was a noble young man, his excellent mother's spirit lived in him. He and Irene were a wonderfully handsome couple—I hoped they would also be a happy pair.

Meantime I had dressed my darling, on this day I would allow no other hand to touch her; she wore a pink satin robe over an underskirt of muslin and lace, and in her hair, whose exquisite hue was unconcealed by powder, a spray of pink roses fastened by a diamond pin. Her exquisite shoulders rose from the ruffle that trimmed her

low waist, and her arms were bared to the dimpled elbows. It was quite time to complete the toilette, for carriage after carriage drove into the courtyard. Stepan Petrovitsch—Irene's father—seemed to have invited the whole province, so many people arrived and with the hospitality usual in this country, which always seemed to me a relic of barbarity, families often brought the friends who happened to be visiting them. With his usual want of consideration Stepan Petrovitsch had not told me how many persons might be expected, and I felt anxious when I saw how rapidly the courtyard and house filled, and the numbers of strange servants, who strolled idly about the corridors. To be sure I knew by experience how few comfort most of them claimed, no one thought of expecting a bed, such as the humblest shopkeepers in France would have required, but there was not even room enough to spread hay and straw on the floor for all, and the thought that I should be obliged to set the table for the wedding dinner in a room, where perhaps twenty gentlemen of more or less doubtful cleanliness had spent the night, was extremely unpleasant to me. My only assistants were awkward, rough peasants and their wives, good for nothing except to eat and drink. I had ordered the cook to be locked up in the wood shed through the night, that he might at least be fit to *commence* his duties. I could depend upon him, if he could not get brandy. He knew how to prepare the rich, fat, indigestible food, which even the women in

this country swallow in such quantities. Sheep, pigs, and calves had been killed, poultry and game were not thought of, pastry and cake of every description had already filled the store room to overflowing for several days, yet I feared the stock of provisions would not suffice. To form some idea of the quantity required, I tried to ascertain how many persons were really expected, but it was a useless task. Stepan Petrovitsch answered in a surly tone: "it wasn't the custom to count guests, the more that came the pleasanter it would be."

The ladies—they did not deserve the name—I received and conducted to the rooms fitted up for them, where they dressed and appeared in the drawing room in robes of heavy materials, braided with clumsy jewelry of gold and precious stones. On greeting them I was favored with a kiss on each cheek, an honor with which I would willingly have dispensed, and the fact that I spoke Russian so fluently—as if one had not time to learn a language in twenty-eight years—always excited their courteous astonishment. I was running busily here and there, and each person who wanted advice or information applied to me, till my head fairly ached from so much talking and thinking, Irenes' maid, a neat kind hearted girl, whom I had taken into the house when an orphan and who was devoted to her young lady, came up and begged me to go to her mistress, who wanted to speak to me a moment. While mounting the stairs, I repeated like a child saying its lesson: "There are forty.

eight silver knives and forks, and it's a marvel they haven't gone to the Jews, fifty table spoons and as many gold tea spoons, there are not enough glasses, even if I take the silver cups from the trunk—if Stephan Petrovitch had told me in time, I would have asked Monsieur Valérien to lend me what was necessary. To be sure, it would have been a loss, for he would never had half of them returned.” This wedding was really a torment, I had not had so much to do in my whole life as during the last few days.

Then I entered Irene's room, where she sat on the little sofa looking as sweet and lovely as an angel, she started up; her face wore an expression of ill concealed anxiety.

“Valérien has not yet arrived, the delay makes me uneasy,” she said hastily.

Her little mouth quivered as if she was ready to cry, but when she saw how quietly I took the matter, her cheerfulness returned.

“Perhaps he wants to show me, that the attentive lover is giving place to the despotic husband, who ruthlessly keeps his poor wife waiting;” she said laughing.

“Oh! there he is!” she suddenly exclaimed, as we heard the trampling of horses, and darted to the window without noticing that her satin train was almost torn from its folds.

The elegant traveling carriage, drawn by six coal black horses, dashed into the courtyard, the gigantic

coachman, wrapped in a bearskin coat and whose beard fell to his waist, drove the proud steeds, and a footman in livery sat on the box beside him. The coachman understood his business admirably, he dashed into the courtyard like a whirlwind, made a short turn before the house, and the same instant the animals stood like statues. It was not Valérian's carriage, he drove three cream colored horses, and his coachman, André, was a merry young lad whose mouth and chin were scarcely covered with a light down.

Irene involuntarily grasped my hand, as she cautiously bent forward to see who the new guest could be. The footman on the box, as well as two others, who stood behind the carriage, instantly sprang forward and opened the door. A gentleman alighted, leaning on the shoulders of the servants like a delicate lady. He wore on his head a tall crimson velvet cap edged with black fox fur, and a large fur cloak of the same color covered his ample shoulders. As the gentleman alighted this garment fell back, revealing a court-dress of silver brocade, which opened over a violet satin vest. Just as the new comer placed his foot on the lowest step of the flight leading to the house, he raised his head and looked sharply at the window where we stood—what features! The thick lips expressed coarseness and cruelty, the massive chin an iron will, bushy black brows bristled over eyes, whose piercing imperious glance gave the bronzed, angular face a savage, threatening appearance.

Irene started and involuntarily made the sign of the cross as these eyes met hers, then hastily drawing back pressed her hand upon her heart, as if she felt a sudden pang.

"It's Count W." she whispered, "that is just the face I imagined belonged to *him*, who listened with cold composure to the shrieks of perishing women and children. It was he, for what other guest would Stepan Petrovitsch have welcomed with such abject servility. He even attempted to kiss the muscular hand the aristocratic gentleman carelessly extended to him. And his example was followed by the guests, who had hurried out and bowed to the ground before the count, who answered their humble greeting with a condescending nod.

"How terrible!" moaned Irene, "instead of my Valérian's fair waving curls, I beheld that horrible face—I cannot recover from the shock."

I was about to reprove her causeless terror, when I heard her father's blustering voice impatiently calling me.

"Where have you been?" he shouted, as I hurried down stairs as fast as my feet would carry me. "His Excellency has come, make haste, bring out the sakuska and then we must go to dinner.

I replied that we must wait for the bridegroom, without whom Irene could not take her place at the table.

"What?" he shrieked furiously, "is His Excellency to be kept waiting for that silly boy, who is probably curling his hair? Have you gone crazy? Don't you

know that the count can eat a dozen such fellows for breakfast, if he chooses. Bring Irene down, His Excellency has already condescended to ask for her. I hope the girl will know how to appreciate the undeserved honor. She must come to the noble gentleman at once, and see that she doesn't neglect to kiss his hand."

"You may rely upon it, that she won't do that," I answered dryly, "modest and gentle as Irene is, she knows that she is a lady. Are you not ashamed to expect your own child to forget her womanly dignity?"

"Be good enough to spare your remarks," he answered coarsely, "if I, her father, command, she has to obey, that's the custom of our country, Madame. Of what consequence is a silly girl compared with such a man? Call her, I must go to the count.—Where's the silver ewer, I don't see it in his room?"

"It would be very strange if you did, since the *marechel de noblesse* won it from you a week ago at the gaming table," I scornfully replied.

"You are the incarnate—"

"Satan," I interrupted completing the sentence, "don't trouble yourself, I already know your agreeable phrases by heart.

He went away, muttering various uncomplimentary words in his beard, and I turned into the dining-room to attend to the table, it did not occur to me to call Irene, she would receive the honor intended for her soon enough. The sakuska was placed on a side table, together with

salt and smoked fish, caviare, and various kinds of liquors in large and small bottles. As I uncorked the rose naliffka, which had been in the cellar several years, its perfume filled the room. Just at that moment the master of the house appeared on the threshold.

“And Irene?” he asked in a tone, that made me start. His Excellency has been gracious enough to inquire for her again—must I bring her down myself?”

“She hasn’t finished her toilette,” I answered with shameless disregard of truth, you can’t possibly ask her to appear half dressed. She will come down directly.” It was useless, I could delay no longer, though I earnestly desired that she should make her entrance leaning on her bridegroom’s arm. A strange foreboding told me, that no good fortune would result from this meeting. Valérian’s absence was incomprehensible, something must have happened to him on the way, only an accident could have caused the delay. If only he had sustained no injury, with Irene’s excitable nature a fright might be dangerous.

I went up stairs to inform her of her father’s command. “Be courteous, but dignified and reserved towards the count,” I said to her, “show him that you are no child, but a lady, who has no occasion to sue for his favor. To you he is merely a guest in your house.”

She clung to me and implored me to remain with her, she dreaded the eyes that would be fixed upon her on her entrance.

“I feel so frightened, *maman*, when you are not with me.”

I called this timidity childish, but my heart was heavy enough—why had the count asked for her twice? He had certainly seen her at the windows. I accompanied her to the drawing room door, which stood wide open. The threshold was crowded with our own and strange servants, feasting their eyes upon the company. The ladies were thickly rouged and wore low dresses, their hair, by means of pomade and powder, was arranged in huge towering structures, their style and movements were vulgar and commonplace, although they asserted that they had studied the most polished society in Moscow. They strutted up and down like peacocks, waving their broad fans and casting side glances towards the upper end of the hall, where His Excellency the count stood, conversing with the gentlemen, who bowed deferentially at each of his gracious words and responded to his condescending jokes with shouts of laughter. His face seemed to me even more repulsive than it had done at the first glance. The gold chain that hung low on his breast supported a miniature of the Empress Catharine set with diamonds, a reward of his distinguished services, his powdered hair made the brow furrowed by lines of passion still more conspicuous, and the delicate lace of the cravat failed to soften the brutal character of the lower portion of the face. The broad shouldered, Herculean figure might look very well in uniform, but was not adapted to the

court dress with diamond studs and the delicate hue of the embroidered satin vest. Stepan Petrovitsch, who had already turned his head several times impatiently towards the door, scarcely perceived the young girl, who still clung to me, when he hastened towards her, seized her hand, and led her to the count.

“Permit me Your Excellency, to present to you my daughter, Irinia Stepanovna, who will consider herself happy if you vouchsafe her a gracious glance.”

Why did she look so bewilderingly beautiful at that moment? Why was it not in my power to lend her my old wrinkled face? A flush of embarrassment and shame crimsoned her cheeks, her long lashes drooped over her eyes, giving them a sweet languishing expression. Never had the perfect symmetry of her beautiful figure been more apparent than in the rose colored dress, that fitted it so closely.

The count's eyes blazed with an expression of ardent admiration, he subdued his loud harsh voice and tried to assume as tender a tone as possible.

“Why fair lady” he said gallantly raising her hand to his lips, “it is my place to sue for a gracious glance. How could you deprive us of your presence so long—you are cruel, Irene Stepanovna. Permit me to clasp around this white neck the ornament I destined for a wedding gift. If I had suspected what beauty I should find here I would have selected some thing far more costly.”

He motioned to his valet and drew from a small casket the latter handed him, an ornament set with rubies, which looked like drops of blood.

“I’ll show you that I understand how to adorn fair ladies, as well as the most skilful maid,” he continued with a disagreeable smile, drawing the necklace through his fingers.

Every trace of life had vanished from Irene’s face ; as if supported by some magic spell, she endured the basilisk gaze fixed upon her and helplessly allowed him to clasp the necklace, but at the touch of his hand trembled so violently, that I was afraid she would fall fainting on the floor.

“Why are you so timid, Irene Stepanovna?” he asked, gloating over the poor child’s terror, “are you afraid of me?”

She raised her dark eyes to his, and even a stone might have been softened by their mute pleading.

“Where is your bridegroom?” he continued,

She murmured a few unintelligible words, because her father made an angry gesture ; he was pulling his beard in rage, because his daughter behaved like a goose.

“He hasn’t yet arrived?” laughed the count, “young lovers seem to be less ardent now, than they were in our time. We shouldn’t have thought of keeping a bride waiting, especially such a beautiful one. But I am very grateful to him and wish he might prolong his absence indefinitely. I should grudge him his place by your

side, the lucky fellow doesn't deserve his good fortune."

Stepan Petrovitsch was fairly radiant with delight, he already had a glimpse of a rascally trick, which might perhaps relieve him from his perpetual money embarrassments at a single stroke.

His Excellency continued to pour forth compliments and flatteries, keeping his eyes fixed with the same disagreeable persistency upon his defenceless victim.

The dishes, under whose weight the tables almost broke down, as according to the profuse custom of the country they were all set on at once, had meantime been brought in. Valérian had promised to arrive at ten, the company were to sit down to dinner at twelve, as he knew. What could have detained him? I wanted to delay a short time, the people could not possibly be hungry, they had been swallowing tea, cake, and confectionary ever since early in the morning. Stepan Petrovitsch was talking with several gentlemen, one of whom, a plain, honorable, universally respected man, was an acquaintance of mine and also on friendly terms with Monsieur Valérian. Unfortunately he seldom came to our house, because he did not like its master.

"Let us wait half an hour longer," I said beseechingly to Stepan Petrovitsch, "it would be an insult to Valérian Maximitsch to sit down to dinner without him."

"Pauline Carlovna is right," said old Gribinoff good-

naturedly, "a man doesn't marry his daughter but once, and the bride and bridegroom are the principal personages at a wedding."

"What has happened to Valérian Maximitsch?" asked another person.

"The young gentleman has overslept himself," replied Irene's father scornfully.

"Perhaps he has met with some accident," observed a third.

"What accident could happen in driving only twenty versts?"

"One can fall down and break his neck while crossing his own courtyard," was the philosophic answer.

"If that should be the case, he certainly couldn't sit down to dinner," cried Stepan Petrovitsch jeeringly.

His Excellency approached the group and drew the master of the house into a corner.

"Let me represent the bridegroom," he whispered, "By Heaven, I never saw so beautiful a girl. Why didn't you tell me in time, what a treasure you had in your house?" Or did you want a beardless country nobleman for a son-in-law? You've been a great fool!"

Rudov's face flushed crimson and his eyes almost started from their sockets, in his surprise at the dazzling prospect so suddenly opened before him.

"What was I to do, your Excellency? The young man was in love with the girl, he belongs to a good family, has a fine estate, a large fortune—"

“And you thought he would be a brilliant match! I repeat it, you’ve been a fool—if I had seen Irene Stepanovna before, I would have asked whether Count Gregor Michailovitsch W. would be agreeable to you as a son-in-law?”

“Your Excellency is graciously disposed to jest with me—”

“It is no jest. This last campaign has taxed my strength, my constitution can no longer endure a wild life. It’s time to select a nurse for my old age, besides I should like to have a son, an heir; who, after my death, is to inherit the estates and wealth our august empress has bestowed upon me? Who is to occupy my palace on the Blue Bridge? You ought to see how magnificent it is, I imported every article of furniture from Paris. Yes, I intend to marry, I want a wife who pleases me, whose beauty will excite envy and admiration at court—Your daughter—it’s a pity that it is too late!”

“Too late?” stammered the father, “if your Excellence commands, it is never too late.”

“To be sure, they are not yet united by the church,” said the count thoughtfully, casting a cunning side glance at his friend.

“A betrothal, a mere betrothal, which is nothing at all, I have a right to break it, the match never suited me, the fellow isn’t at all to my taste, there’s no marrow in him, he never drinks, sits over his books, makes sentimental speeches—”

“He won’t draw back willingly.”

“Who will ask him? When he comes, I’ll go to him and say: ‘Be kind enough to drive home again, there will be no wedding.’”

“Then your daughter will clasp your knees and sob: ‘Have pity, dear father, or I shall die.’ The young man will rave like a maniac—”

“There are ways and means. Tears ought not to trouble your Excellency, besides Irinia Stepanovna will be wise enough to value the good fortune that has fallen to her from the skies. To be the wife of the famous general, the distinguished Count W., to live in a palace, appear at the court of the great Catherine—it wouldn’t surprise me if it turned her head. After a few days she’ll forget the milk face, as much as if he had never existed. That’s the way with women, they rave and tear their hair and then before one can turn round are perfectly happy and contented.”

“We could probably manage her, the most important point is the way Valérian Maximitsch takes the affair. If he should prove refractory and afterwards come to St. Petersburg, to approach his former betrothed—you perceive it might involve me in difficulties. In the first place, I shouldn’t like to be betrayed by my young wife and exposed to the jeers of the court, and besides my enemies would not fail to bring the story to the ears of the empress, whose caprices are incalculable—a dangerous conspiracy might easily be formed against me.”

Stepan Petrovitch looked cautiously around, to see that no listener was near, and said a few words which I could not understand, for his voice sank to a whisper. My blood froze in my veins. I had only caught fragments of the conversation, but their connection was easily understood.

Merciful God, could the human soul reach such an abyss of depravity. Must not Heaven send a thunderbolt to destroy these fiendish plans? I was convinced that Valérian would not suffer his betrothed bride to be dragged from him at the very steps of the altar, his sleeping energy would awake and he would defend what was dearest to him with the courage of a lion.

I must warn him, reveal the plots that threaten him. Was there no place where I could conceal Irene from the rude clutch of those blood-stained hands? No, I was defenceless, defenceless as in this world the weak always are against the strong!

My eyes grew dim, my knees tottered, I was forced to sit down in a chair, that I might not fall. Kind hearted old Gribinoff said sympathizingly.

“What is the matter, Pauline Carlovna, you are as white as if you had seen a ghost?”

I seized his arm and pressing it convulsively, gasped:

“You’ll help us? You are the only honest man among all these people.”

“If it is in my power,” he answered with a compassionate shrug of the shoulder, “he seemed to understand

my meaning. The count's unconcealed admiration and marked attention to Irene had not escaped the notice of the guests. When, raising his voice, he offered to take the seat destined for the absent bridegroom, an eager whispering arose among the women, each of whom envied my poor child; not one of the hard cold faces showed one trace of pity or sympathy.

I was still sitting helplessly in my corner, when they all passed into the dining room, the count in advance with Irene, who walked beside him like an automaton. I soon heard the rattling of plates and glasses, mingled with peals of laughter. Had I not had a bad dream? Was it possible that a crime would be committed among this gay company? The wish might exist, but surely no one would venture on its execution. My overweening love for the child had led me to give a threatening interpretation to cynical remarks. In any case, I would whisper a word of warning to Valérian—if the priest had not been such a miserable, cowardly wight, I would have managed to have the betrothed couple disappear from the throng for half an hour and be hastily married, with Gribinoff and myself for witnesses. When the priest had once pronounced the blessing, the church itself, which does not permit a marriage to be lightly sundered, would protect them.

I went into the dining room, which was a scene of great confusion. The numerous servants moving to and fro increased the crowd, it was really difficult to force

one's way through the throng. A hot, sultry atmosphere filled the room, the odors of the various dishes mingled with the fumes of wine, cordials and mead. The count and Irene were seated at the head of the table, his face was flushed, he was talking eagerly to her and had seized her hand; which he kissed several times. Her eyes were cast down, from time to time a burning blush suffused her face, she scarcely ventured to breath, and the plate before her remained untouched. My fears returned with redoubled violence.

Just at that moment I heard Valérian's voice outside and he hastily entered, his right arm was in a sling, his face pale and distorted with pain. He gave me no time to speak.

"Don't be anxious about me and soothe Irene," he said in an agitated tone, "nothing serious has happened, the involuntary delay was terribly annoying. Half way here one of the wheels of my new carriage broke, the horses took fright, dragged us for some distance, and finally threw us into a ditch. Andra, poor fellow, was badly injured by the hoofs of the frantic animals, I fear he won't survive. My arm was dislocated so I could give little assistance; but I couldn't leave him lying helpless in the ditch, so I sent the footman, who remained unhurt, back to Malinovka to get a carriage and servants. The surgeon came at once and set my arm in the nearest hut—but unfortunately it occasioned a delay of two hours."

"How are you, Valérian Maximitsch?" echoed on all sides. Those nearest, in whom the strong drink had produced a very affectionate frame of mind, embraced him and kissed him on both cheeks, while others held out their brimming glasses, from which he was expected to sip, ere they were drained to his health. His eyes sought Irene. It did not disturb him to see the count beside her, this place of honor was his due, as the most distinguished guest, but he was justly wounded not to find the seat on her other side vacant—was he to be separated from his betrothed bride on this day? However, as it was Stepan Petrovitsch who occupied it, he thought the latter had only taken it for a time and would rise as soon as the bridegroom appeared. He was mistaken, Rudov did not rise, he scarcely vouchsafed his future son-in-law a careless nod, and when Irene attempted to start up and go to her lover, seized her rudely by the arm and with an angry glance hissed :

"You won't stir from this place." To the young man he said haughtily over his shoulder. "I really thought we should be compelled to renounce the honor of your company, Valérian Maximitsch, you don't seem to have been in any hurry, Irene has good reason to feel offended. Perhaps you can find a chair farther down."

"He who comes too late loses his rights," said the count with a scornful laugh, bending so close to the young girl, that his lips almost touched her shoulder.

"He is wounded, let me go to him!" she exclaimed

with startling energy, but her father's flashing eyes paralyzed her will.

"A scratch, he said contemptuously," the young gentleman probably brushed against a tree."

Valérian did not know how to understand these words. Were they rude jests, or was his intended father-in-law usually by no means punctilious in regard to matters of etiquette, really offended by his late arrival? The wine had probably gone to his head, and in this condition he required cautious treatment. The guests were fully occupied in eating, drinking, and talking—there was such a noise in the low room, that one was obliged to shriek in order to be heard by his next neighbor—only those nearest to the group noticed the incident, and they thought it an excellent joke to separate the bride-groom from his bride.

"I'll tell you what, Valérian Maximitsch," said a red-nosed country nobleman, whose better half in the course of years had developed into a mountain of flesh," after marriage one is glad enough to shake off his wife for a while, the fire soon dies out, very soon."

As Stephan Petrovitsch seemed by no means disposed to give the young man his rightful seat, the latter, to avoid angry discussions, was forced to take the chair which had been left empty at the lower end of the table. He thus happened to sit beside a relative of the master of the house, an elderly, spiteful old maid, who revenged herself for the neglect bestowed upon her by the world,

by making venomous speeches. She hated Stepan Petrovitsch particularly, because he, whom most people still supposed to be rich, would not even give her a yearly stipend of a few roubles, and still more because he called her a dried up old monkey.

“Well, my dear boy,” she said, twisting her toothless mouth in a scornful smile, “I pity you for being obliged to content yourself with me. Yes, that’s the way things happen in this life, instead of Irene Stepanovna, the foolish old cousin! But you must surely be delighted to see how His Excellency the Count, whose august presence has turned the head of your father-in-law, as well as those of all the men in the company, devotes himself to your betrothed bride. To be sure, a plain country nobleman would’nt allow another person to take possession of wife or bride without ceremony, but in fashionable society, in St. Petersburg, it must be the latest style. You who have received a fashionable education, doubtless do not find it unpleasant.”

Meantime I had approached *Monsieur Valerian*, the spiteful old maid kept her little bird’s eyes fixed upon us and pricked her ears like a hunting hound. I could not say a word that she would not have heard.

“Is your arm very painful?” I asked, cautiously touching the injured limb and smoothing the bandage. While so doing, with a skill that would have done honor to a lover, I slipped between the folds of the silk handkerchief a scrap of paper, on which I had scrawled with

a lead pencil: "They want to snatch Irene from you, be on your guard!"

He replied with a significant glance, that *one* spot pained him very much—pointing to the place where I had just concealed the note—but he hoped it would soon pass off.

"It must be cured before to-morrow," said the old maid, "how are you to be married, if you can't use your right hand?"

"The dinner seemed as if it would never end, the guests showed unwearied endurance in devouring the various dishes, roast mutton, fat veal, huge fish—all disappeared in their fathomless stomachs. There were only two at the table, who eat nothing: Irene and Valérian. They could only express their feeling by their looks—ah! it cut me to the heart to see those two dear children sacrificed to brutal violence. Valérian from his birth had been one of those unfortunate mortals, who are said to be born under an unlucky star. His mother had often told me, how when a little child he had almost starved to death because six nurses, one after the other, had proved unworthy, his nursery governesses and tutors, after a short time, invariably developed qualities which led to their speedy dismissal; every childish disease took a dangerous turn, he had lost his father before his birth, his mother was snatched away in the prime of life, his remaining relatives, all excellent people died young—he had no luck. He often jested about his "*guignon*," as

he called it, but Irene and I noticed, that the laugh did not come from his heart and he could not resist a dread of impending misfortune.

The company rose from the table, the flushed, partly intoxicated guests streamed out of the room, the betrothed pair could at last exchange a few words, a pressure of the hand.

“Valérian, I am afraid!” whispered the young girl, leaning her head on his shoulder, “I should like to be far, far away. If I were once with you in Malinovka—this count—”

“Has he dared to say anything to offend you?” exclaimed Valérian, with suppressed fury. A dark flush crimsoned his handsome young face.

“I don’t know,” she moaned, “when he speaks to me, I have a terrible feeling of pain, which almost deprives me of consciousness. I hear his voice coming to me, as if he stood on the other side of a rushing water fall, and see nothing but fire and blood before my eyes—He is terrible, keep away from him, I beseech you, I should die if any quarrel arose between you! I feel so sad and anxious—I never imagined this day would pass *so!*”

They stood side by side a moment unnoticed by the crowd; he put his arm around her and kissed her almost solemnly, as if to say: I am here and will protect you! The two innocent children! May God never forgive those who crushed these beautiful human flowers. If I should

be forced to go down to the hell, of which the priests speak, I would willingly allow myself to be burned by its flames, if I were only sure that these atrocious wretches would be tortured by the sharpest pangs.

Owing to the dark rainy weather, the rooms which received little light through the small windows, had grown dark early. The gipsy band were already tuning their instruments, the lamps were lighted, the chairs pushed aside, every one was waiting for the dancing to begin. Good Heavens, what a nation ! Just from a dinner where the ladies had eaten more than peasants could do in my country, they wanted to whirl around at once. These iron constitutions did not allow themselves a moments rest, every pleasure was carried to excess. And my refined, delicate child, who had grown up under my care like a flower, to be in the midst of this throng ! Although I had lived among them more than a quarter of a century I had never been able to accustom myself to this barbaric mode of life, the sharp contrasts in which it abounded. The ragged, unwashed gipsies appeared amid the gaily dressed company and took their seats on a few benches at the back of the hall. Ladies in brocade dresses, with diamonds on their hearts, and gentlemen in uniform danced to the music played by these long haired fellows whose lean brown limbs appeared through all the holes in their torn garments.

Irene and Valérian had only talked together a few minutes, when Rudov came for his daughter. Never

since her birth, had he troubled himself so much about her as within the last few hours.

“You are entirely neglecting your duties as hostess, a peasant girl couldn’t behave more rudely, is this the result of the education upon which Madame Laurent prides herself so much?” he said, pushing her away from Valérian. “Go and join the young girls, who are going to dance.”

“Allow me to take Irene into the room ; if she afterwards accepts other partners, it is the custom for the betrothed couple to open the ball.”

“We’ll depart from the custom,” replied Stepan Petrovitsch dryly, “I give the tone in my own house. Irene will remain in the room and not pull a long face”—this was accompanied with a sinister glance—“and you will have the goodness to follow me into my own apartment, where I wish to discuss various matters without being overheard by others.”

I caught these words and saw the evil expression lurking around his mouth. “*Du courage*” I whispered to Valérian, “show yourself a man, defend yourself to the uttermost.”

He turned pale, not because his courage failed, but because it suddenly became clear, that he was about to enter upon a struggle, whose result must decide the happiness of his life. The change had happened too suddenly, he was still unable to collect his thoughts and see the full extent of the danger. The gentlemen left the

room and soon after the count disappeared. My anxiety increased every second.

The flush had faded from Irene's cheeks, she felt that some vague danger was drawing nearer and nearer; her imploring glance called me to her, as with a sorrowful smile on her lips, she whirled past me on the arm of an officer. I could not go to her, I was obliged first of all to learn what was passing between the three. And meantime the servants were constantly running to me with a thousand questions:

“Pauline Carlovna, the housekeeper says the eggs are almost gone.”

“Pauline Carlovna, the cook wishes to know whether he shall send the ham to the table cold or hot?”

“Are the guests' servants to have any kwas, Pauline Carlovna?”

I had ruled the house for many years, I could not allow anything to be lacking without incurring the reproach of having failed in my duty. No sooner had I provided the necessary articles, then I hurried to the other end of the house, in which was Stepan Petrovitsch's sitting room. I crept noiselessly to the door, which was locked. I could hear nothing, the thick walls smothered every sound. I remembered there was a closet adjoining the apartment, which could also be reached from the billiard room. This alcove was never entered and only used to store chests and trunks. I ran up to look for the key and fortunately soon found it. Cautiously turning it in

the lock, I glided into the little dark closet, which was separated from Petrovitsch's room only by a thin partition, in which there were several holes. I could overlook the lighted apartment. Valérian was leaning with his uninjured arm on the table in the middle of the room, Rudov stood opposite, and the count was seated on the sofa.

"You will not?" cried Stepan Petrovitsch furiously.

"No, a thousand times no!" exclaimed the young man, whose bearing expressed the most fearless decision. "How can you expect me to do a thing unworthy of a nobleman, a base, rascally act? You ask me to give up a bride, whom I idolize, and who returns my love, at the moment when I am about to appear with her before the altar! This is worse than madness! What would people think, if it were said: 'Valérian Maximitsch has changed his mind, he will not marry Irene Stepanovna.'"

"That doesn't concern you, I'll break the engagement, it no longer suits me."

Valérian's blue eyes flashed, and he drew his slight figure up to its full height.

"You can deal with your serfs in this way, a nobleman does not accept such insults unavenged. I insist upon your giving me your reasons for this unprecedented conduct and repeating them before the assembled company, that *my* honor may remain untarnished—And even this won't satisfy me," he continued in a more vehement tone, "Irene must decide, I will hear from her own lips

whether she voluntarily breaks a bond, that has been formed by the most ardent love. I will not leave her defenceless to your despotic power, what do you want to do with her? Sell her, stake her on the hazard of a card? Answer!" he cried, stamping his foot, "what do you mean to do with her?"

An outburst of passion from a person of quiet, gentle nature always makes a terrible impression, it is something for which no one is prepared.

Rudov had not anticipated any such energetic opposition. He turned towards the count, who was twirling his gold snuff box between his fingers and seemed to have remained silent until now.

"Do you hear this madman, Your Excellency? Is it possible to talk reason with him? He wants to make a scene, which will bring all the guests."

"Tell the young gentleman you have made a different disposal of your daughter's hand," replied the latter, leaning carelessly back and crossing one leg over the other, "perhaps he will then understand, that his nicest course is to return home at once."

With all his brazen effrontery, the other cast down his eyes in confusion, now that he was forced to utter his base design in plain words. The young man with the waving hair, the milk face, had almost intimidated him he had been prepared for entreaties, protestations, and complaints, but not this manly resistance.

"Be good enough to remember, my dear sir," he

began, "that you were never welcome to me as a son-in-law ; if that old dragon, Pauline Carlovna, had not been daily dinning the engagement into my ears, I should never have given my consent. The objections I always had have now become stronger—"

"What objections? Since when? Name them!" exclaimed Valérian furiously.

"What would be the use?" replied the older man coarsely, "I've no inclination to repeat them—you are too young for a father to be able with a clear conscience to entrust his child to you."

The hypocrite! The worthless liar. *He* talked of his paternal duties, his conscience!

"You knew exactly how old I was, when I asked for Irene's hand."

"Yes, yes, for Heaven's sake don't repeat the same old stories, a man often does things he afterwards regrets—And why should I justify myself to you?" he continued angrily, "His Excellency has been gracious enough to take a fancy to the girl, he wants to make her his wife—I hope you will now see, my good fellow, that your role of bridegroom is over—"

Valérian gazed at the count with dilated eyes, it seemed incredible, such an insolent mockery of the most sacred things was inconceivable.

"You!" he burst forth in so powerful a voice, that even the distinguished gentleman on the sofa started, "you dare to fix your impure thoughts upon Irene!"

Don't you know that she abhors you, that you inspire her with horror? All the terrors her fancy has ever conjured up she connects with your name—she will never become your wife, she would rather endure the most torturing death.”

“Women are not anxious to die, when a brilliant future opens before them,” replied the count, his stern bronze face assuming a very disagreeable expression, “and the horror the beautiful Irene Stepanovna feels, will soon disappear, when she finds I can vie with the most tender lover.”

Two scarlet spots appeared on the young man's forehead.

“And you will carry this shameless outrage so far, here in the midst of a numerous company?” he said in a hoarser tone.

You are very inexperienced, Valérian Maximitsch, there is not one of the guests who will not envy Stepan Petrovitsch the honor I show him. Who is to stand in my way?”

“I!” cried the young man, making a movement as if to rush upon the count, his strength seemed to have increased ten fold, for he hurled Rudov, who attempted to restrain him into the corner like a child. “If you steal my treasure like a robber, I will defend myself as I would against a robber. Either you or I! I'll shoot you down like a mad wolf, even in the church! Oh! don't cast angry glances at me! You will not frighten me. I'll raise

my voice till it reaches the empress, who allows even her favorites to commit no crimes, you would not be the first to be hurled from a high position."

"Don't listen to the mad man, your Excellency!" exclaimed Rudov, "he's an incarnate devil, I'll have him driven away by my dogs."

"Count W. had risen, his tall figure towered above Valérian's, arrogance and malice struggled for the mastery in his features, as he said :

"Very well, you won't give up your supposed right, so we will decide the matter, not like women, with words, but like men, with arms in our hands. I'll do you the honor of fighting with you. I, Field Marshal Count W. with you, the insignificant country nobleman, your threats can only extort a smile. Do you know how far it is to St. Petersburg? Just a thousand versts, and at every station where you change horses, it will cost me only a word to have you thrown into a prison, from whence you would set out on the journey to Siberia. But I am generous enough not to make use of the power bestowed by my rank. I will fight with you as if you were my equal, and that I may have no advantage, as your right arm is useless, will also fire with my left."

It was not enough to tear the heart out of his breast—they wanted to murder him too.

"Blood! Yes, I must see your blood!" cried Valérian passionately, "let us place the pistols at each other's breasts, that the bullets may not miss their aim."

"I too desire the shortest possible distance," replied the count coldly, "we'll go into the billiard-room and shoot across the table. Stephen Petrovisch will be my second, yours will not be difficult to find. I always carry pistols with me, my valet will bring them."

So the horrible thing had happened and I was condemned to witness it, it was too late to leave my hiding place, as the gentlemen were to proceed at once to the billiard-room. For one moment I thought of throwing myself on my knees before Irene's father and beseeching him not to condemn his child to eternal misery. But he would not have listened to an angel's voice, the count had excited his avarice, he already saw himself once more in a position to gratify all his vicious tastes.

I had not closed the door entirely, so through the chink I could obtain a tolerable view of what was passing. The quarter of an hour required to make the necessary preparations elapsed in complete silence. The count paced up and down the room with a heavy tread, Stepan Petrovitsch loaded the pistols, Valérian, who had said that he wished to make some disposal of his property in case of his death, sat at a side table writing.

From the ceiling hung a smoking oil lamp, which cast a dim light through the spacious apartment, the storm raged outside, the rain plashed against the windows, ever and anon, when the doors of the dancing hall were opened, the shrill notes of the violins echoed on the

stillness. Yonder the guests were merry making, and here—

The count's valet entered with an officer, who had been told nothing except His Excellency wished to see him a moment. Rudov went to meet him and drawing him into a corner, whispered a few words. I understood that he spoke of a quarrel which had occurred between His Excellency and Valérian Maximitsch, the latter had unfortunately permitted himself to make several disrespectful remarks, which the noble gentleman could not suffer to pass unpunished; instead of giving the thoughtless young fellow a well deserved chastisement, he had been gracious enough to consent to fight with him. The officer of course assented to Rudov's opinion, was indignant at Valérian's insolence, and admired His Excellency's magnanimity, but declared himself ready to act as the formers second.

I had never prayed much during my whole life, on earth I had witnessed nothing but the defeat and martyrdom of the good, the insolent triumph of the wicked—how was I to believe in a just, loving God, who governed the world with a wise and benevolent hand. The prospect of a reward in the other world, which our priests so lavishly promise, had never been a consolation to me. I did not understand why it should be necessary for people to nourish themselves on hunger and calamity, in order to taste the joys of Paradise. This world was very real and practical, the other vague and misty. To be honest,

I was a skeptic ; I did my duty according to my ability, because I thought I owed it to my human dignity, and desired no other happiness than a death sleep so sound, that I should not be aroused by the miserable bustle of this world.

But when imprisoned in this dark little room, helplessly watching the progress of events, knowing that this blow would destroy the happiness of my beloved child, some irresistible power drew me down upon my knees. Like the simple peasant in the church, I bowed my forehead to the ground and prayed from the inmost depths of my heart, that God, if, He were really omnipotent, would put a stop to this evil deed and protect the two children, whose only fault was their pure, fervent love.

“Are you ready?” I heard the count ask coldly. I cautiously approached the crack in the door, that I might see and hear.

Valérian folded a sheet of paper and drawing a seal ring from his finger, pressed it on the wax that closed the letter.

“I should like to say a few words to my servant, he observed turning to Stepan Petrovitsch, “be kind enough to send for him.”

“I beg you to avoid everything, that could make a scene,” replied Rudov angrily, “hitherto no one suspects this unpleasant affair, whose possibly mournful result you you have to attribute solely to your own obstinacy.”

“Be assured that the house, which contains Irene, is

too sacred, in spite of all that has happened, for me to attract any more witnesses. I merely wish to give my servant an order." He was grave and calm, his youthful features seemed to be more sharply out-lined, as if he had suddenly grown older. Perhaps God would guide his hand and the bullet would reach his shameless enemy Yet then he would have slain a *grand seigneur*, a famous general, the courts would take up the affair, he would be condemned, sent to Siberia like a common criminal—there was no escape for the unhappy youth.

The gentlemen had already taken their places on each side of the brilliard table, the uninitiated might suppose to play a game—ay a bloody game.

Valérian stood with his back towards me; when his servant, Petia, who was also his foster brother, entered, he retired with him close to the door behind which I was concealed.

"You see this letter," he said in a low tone, "as soon as you leave this room, go directly to the chamber occupied by Pauline Carlovna, the French governess, and put it on her writing desk, where she will see it at once. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Valérian Maximitsch."

"Do you swear to obey my order without delay?"

"I swear," replied the servant crossing himself, and evidently feeling a sense of uneasiness at the solemn words. At a sign from his master, he left the room.

A letter for me! I might have put my hand through

the chink and taken it, no doubt it contained important directions, whose execution he confided to me.

Stepan Petrovitsch now bolted the door, the count and Valérian removed their coats and vests, the herculean figure of one, the slight youthful frame of the other, were distinctly visible under the thin linen shirts. There was a death like silence, interrupted only by the notes of the violins. I fancied I could see Irene in her pink dress, as her dark eyes wandered around the ball room in search of her lover.

“Do you agree to the conditions?” the officer asked Valérian.

The latter made a sign of assent.

“I suppose this is your first duel?” said the other confidentially.

“My first.”

“Then keep your hand steady and aim carefully. The count is a famous shot, it’s really an honor to fight your first duel with such an enemy—To be sure, it is unfortunate that you must hold your pistol in your left hand, it requires practice to fire steadily.”

“I ask you once more, Valérian Maximitsch,” said Count W. to the young man, “will you listen to reason? Stepan Petrovitsch’s determination is unalterable, you cannot under any circumstances induce him to change it. If you will promise to take no steps, either now or later, to restore the broken tie, the insults to me will be forgotten and you can return home unmolested.”

"I will assert to my last breath tne right you trample under foot," replied Valérian with quivering lips, "only brute force shall induce me to yield to the murderer of Otschakoo."

The dim red light of the smoking oil lamp fell on the two mortal enemies. On one side the man of fifty-six, with his hard, unyielding features, which expressed the habit of despotic authority, cruelty, and sensualism, on the other the slender youth, whose fair waving locks formed a halo around his head. Both had raised their pistols, the elder man's face wore a disagreeable, triumphant smile, which boded nothing good. The seconds counted: "one—two—three" — and before they said: "fire!" two—no, *one* shot rang on the air. The other came a few seconds later and crashed through the window pane, the hand that sent it was no longer steady—Valérian staggered back—Forgetting everything I threw open the door: "Murderer!" I shrieked to the count, who still stood with uplifted weapon, and raised the dying man, whose pale face I supported on my heart. The white shirt was crimsoned with the drops of blood that oozed slowly from the wound, the shot had been well aimed—it had pierced his heart. The unfortunate youth opened his dim eyes and recognized *her*, who bent over him, his lips moved convulsively, as if he were making the greatest exertion to utter a word—it was all in vain, but I understood the meaning of the imploring gaze he

fixed upon me. I placed my lips close to his ear and whispered :

“I will remain with Irene till my death, come what may !”

Something like a smile flitted over his face, he uttered a sigh and expired.

“The old Frenchwoman ! The devil brought her here !” cried Stepan Petrovitsch at my unexpected appearance. But the majesty of death exerted its influence over the hardened sinner, he dared not approach the dying man, whom I was trying with my feeble arms to lift on the sofa.

“The duel took place in strict compliance with the rules, was it not so ?” he asked hastily, turning to the officer, who was looking around him with a puzzled expression. “In case of necessity, you can bear witness to the fact. Duels often have an unfortunate termination, the young fool ran to his death of his own accord—you heard the conciliatory words his Excellency addressed to him at the last moment.”

“Yes indeed, yes indeed,” the officer quickly replied, “the duel was perfectly fair, though its result is greatly to be regretted.”

“Therefore it will be best to keep the affair secret for the present,” observed the count, “the guests need know nothing about it. It won’t restore the young man to life, to have everybody discuss the matter — It will

prove no detriment to your promotion, if you are discreet."

The officer made a military salute and replied: I understand, Your Excellency."

"What shall we do with the dying man—he can't stay here," whispered Rudov, glancing timidly at me.

"Put him in his carriage and let him be driven home," said the count, "his servants can bury him. He has no relatives, I believe?"

"I know of none, they must be very distant."

"They won't trouble themselves about him, even if they ever hear of his death, they perhaps live on the frontiers of the empire—Make haste, Stepan Petrovitsch, we must take advantage of this time, while people are occupied at the other end of the house; order the horses to be harnessed, you and the captain can carry him to the carriage."

These words were rapidly exchanged, while I knelt beside Valérian and received his last sigh. Rudov and the officer obeyed the count's orders, they were not sorry to leave a room which contained a corpse. The general, who was accustomed to ride over battle fields, careless whether his horse's hoofs crushed the wounded, knew no feeling of dread. He approached me.

"Listen, Madame," he said imperiously, seizing my hand to raise me from the floor. I pushed him back. "Murderer!" I exclaimed, "I witnessed the deed. You

fired before the signal was given, you basely murdered him ! ”

“Beware of repeating this slander, Madame, it might cost you too dear, the seconds can swear that no irregularity occurred ; in a duel both parties must be prepared to lose their lives—you will keep your absurd fancies to yourself—do you understand ? ”

I gazed at him silently, this stern, iron man crushed all resistance.

“You are, I believe, a woman of great energy, you can accomplish what you desire. I beg you to impress my words upon your mind—Irene Stepanovna will become my wife—”

“Never ! ” I passionately exclaimed, “she will die, rather than marry the man who killed her lover.”

“Nonsense,” he harshly interrupted, “the young man’s fate will be concealed from her—who is to tell her the story ? As an obedient daughter, she must submit to her father’s will, she will be married to me to-morrow and directly after the ceremony I shall set out for St. Petersburg—there she will soon forget her melancholy whims. You are devoted to Irene Stepanovna and would consider a separation from her the greatest misfortune ; if you will promise to maintain the most complete silence in regard to what has happened here, to let no word, no look betray it, I will permit you to remain with Irene. You can accompany her and live in my house, on condition that you exert all your influence to reconcile her to

her fate. Refuse to accept my proposal, and this very night I will have you put into a telega* and transported to a lonely estate I possess in the province of Orenburg. There you can end your days. So chose! The girl will be mine, though Heaven itself should interfere!"

The struggle I endured was a terrible one, hatred and loathing almost threatened to stifle me, I literally could not force my lips to utter a sound, I felt as if an iron hand were clutching my throat. What could I, a poor, feeble foreigner, do to protect the darling of my heart? The only thing, that could in any degree soften her lot, would be my love, my faithful affection. She could lay her weary head on the breast of her old nurse and give vent to her despair in tears; she would have one creature near her on whom she could implicitly depend, with whom she could speak of the past, of Valerian. And had not his glazing eyes asked this sacrifice of me? Yes, it was my duty not to desert my beloved child, I must at least pretend to conquer my horror, my fierce hatred. If I had been indispensable to her tender youth, how much more so I should become from this hour.

"I will do what you ask, I will be silent," I faltered with trembling lips.

"I thought you could act like a sensible person. Now go to Irene and if she asks for her bridegroom, tell her he has gone away because he had a quarrel with Stepan

* Cart used in Russia

Petrovitsch about money affairs—invent some plausible excuse.”

I bent for the last time over the still face of the dead, pressed a kiss on the cold brow, and cut a soft fair curl from the young head—perhaps a time might come when I could give her this dear memento.

What more have I to tell? My eyes are so dim with tears, I can scarcely see what I am writing.

When I returned to the ballroom, where the dancers, with flushed faces, were whirling in rapid circles, and both masters and servants, in consequence of large potations of wine and liquors, were mingling in motley confusion, Irene escaping from her partner's arm, rushed towards me. Her beautiful face expressed the most terrible anxiety.

“Where is Valérian?” she whispered breathlessly, clutching my hand and fixing her large dark eyes wildly on my face.

My tongue seemed paralyzed, and my throat felt closed.

“What is the matter, *ma bonne*? Some accident has happened, you look terribly disturbed. Where is Valérian?” she repeated still more urgently.

“On the way to Malinovka,” I faltered, “compose yourself, my dear child, your father has had a violent scene with him, which caused an open breach. The wedding will be deferred, if not—you must submit to your fate, remember that parents have unlimited power over their children—”

“Valérian has gone, without taking leave of me?” she asked impatiently. “You are concealing the truth!”

I drew her into a corner and whispered tender, loving words—I know not what I said, but vaguely recollect having spoken of sorrows and trials, which no life can be spared, of the measure of suffering allotted to each individual.

She did not seem to understand the meaning of my words, her features were rigid, her eyes glittered with a strange, restless light, and she sat motionless with clasped hands, as if paralysed. The couples danced past us, the gipsies violins shrieked in shrill, piercing tones, glasses clinked—a madder tumult could not have reigned in hell. Then Stepan Petrovitsch and the count made their way through the crowd towards us. His excellency had put on the court dress of silver brocade with its diamond buttons, and the miniature of the great Catharine once more adorned his breast.

“Here, my little daughter,” said the father, “I bring you a bridegroom, who will please you better. Yes, open your eyes in amazement, you never ventured to dream of such an honor. You will be Her Excellency the Countess and ride in a gilded coach, I hope you won’t look down condescendingly upon your papa—Give His Excellency the betrothal kiss.”

The count put out his arm to draw the beautiful girl who had suddenly inspired him with so violent a passion, closer to him—but she shrank back, her eyes dilated, and

she stared fixedly at a small, dark red spot visible on the silver brocade—A shudder, that made her teeth chatter audibly, shook her delicate frame.

“Blood!” she shrieked, “blood! He has killed Valérian!” and fell fainting on the floor.

Her father raised her and carried her to her room, where he laid her on the bed and left her alone with me. The gayety had been interrupted only a moment. Irinia Stepanovna has fainted, it was said, no one had heard the words she uttered. Stepan Petrovitsch assured his guests that it meant nothing, his daughter was bewildered by her unexpected good fortune and brilliant prospects, she would be bright and well again the next day. He begged that no one would allow his pleasure to be disturbed. His Excellency seconded the request.

People undoubtedly thought it strange, that the marriage to which they were invited, would not be solemnized with another bridegroom, but it did not occur to them to inquire into particulars; there would be plenty of time for that, when the festivities were over, when they had eaten and drank and danced themselves weary—then they could indulge in gossip and wonder to their hearts content. Scarcely any one had a special interest in Valérian, they were too slightly acquainted with him and he was too unlike his neighbors. They thought it perfectly natural, that the poor devil had stolen secretly away, and the gentleman made bad jokes on his having had his bride snatched from under his nose. The ladies did not under-

stand the count's taste. How could he fancy such a fragile doll! And their faces wore a sulky expression as they talked of the splendor and luxury, that would henceforth surround the simple girl.

When Irene returned to consciousness, she gazed dreamily around the familiar room.

"Did they not say Valérian was dead?" she asked. Her voice was utterly expressionless and her eyes remained dry.

"He lives, my darling, but he is lost to you," I said, telling a bold lie in my terrible anxiety. In her condition, I would not have told her the truth, even if no vow had bound my tongue—I feared for her reason.

"Shall I never see him again?"

"In Heaven my beloved child, where the good are united after the short trials of earth."

"There is no Heaven and no God," she answered in a hollow tone, sitting erect and pushing back her heavy hair with both hands. She gazed around her for a time in silence. "I will never pray any more—it is foolish," she said, then turned her face to the wall and remained motionless. Heavy steps came up the stairs, and her limbs again shook with the violent tremor, from which she never recovered. Stepan Petrovitsch appeared in the doorway. "Irene!" he called in a loud, stern voice.

She started up, her father's presence had always inspired her with unconquerable terror.

"The count is inquiring about your health, I told him

you were better and that there was no fear of another fainting fit." He seized her roughly by the wrist. "Beware of arousing my anger, I want to see a bright, cheerful face, which will show how contented you are with the change in your fate. Answer!" he shouted imperiously.

She raised her tearless eyes to his. "I will obey you," fell wearily from her lips.

He nodded, then paused before me a moment, as if to say something, but I met him with such a fearless, piercing gaze, that the blood involuntarily mounted into his face and he hastily moved away, muttering that he should be glad, to at least get rid of the old witch of a French-woman. Irene had turned away from me, I heard her whisper in an almost triumphant tone: "No, there is no God, no Heaven—why should I pray?"

All through the night she remained in a half recumbent posture; she would not allow herself to be undressed, her pink satin train trailed on the floor, the spray of roses had fallen from her hair, but the diamond star still glittered among the dark braids. She did not move, did not weep, did not speak, only at times her limbs trembled so violently, that the bed shook under its light burden. There was a constant running to and fro in the house, doors open and shut, guests and servants laughed and sang. A deathlike silence pervaded Irene's room, her little dog scratched at the door and whined for admittance. I sat beside the young girl holding her hand in mine, we did not exchange a word. I wept con-

stantly—she did not shed a tear. Towards morning a short slumber closed the eyes of the unhappy child. It was not refreshing, for it tortured her with terrible dreams, she moaned, sighed, and tossed restlessly to and fro. I took advantage of the opportunity to collect and pack in a trunk a few of the articles which would be most needed ; that is doubtless the way the casket, which the young girl especially valued as her lover's gift, came into my possession. While turning over her wardrobe, each article of which was connected with thoughts of a happy future, I probably found her journal—I had not even known she kept one. Of course it contained nothing but memories of Valérian, which might perhaps at some future day afford a sorrowful consolation ; I must have locked it in the casket, at least I think I remember having done so.

Hearing a movement in the adjoining room, I returned thither ; Irene had awaked and was sitting on the edge of the bed. Her beautiful features wore the same rigid expression, she looked like a marble statue. She had taken off the pink dress and removed the diamonds from her hair, which fell nearly to her feet.

“It is time for me to dress,” she said, without turning her wandering eyes towards me, “isn't the wedding to take place at twelve o'clock ?”

“How do you feel, my child ?” I asked, clasping her tenderly in my arms, “wouldn't you like a cup of tea, you have tasted nothing since yesterday.”

She shook her head. "I want nothing, I only wish it were all over! Why should we linger in the ante-room of hell, when we know we must enter the place of eternal torment?"

This death-like, apathetic condition was a thousand times worse, than the wildest outburst of despair; if she had raved, torn her hair—it would have been easier for me to endure. The main nerve of her soul seemed paralyzed or sundered, she spoke and moved mechanically, as if she had no feeling or consciousness of what awaited her. I began to comb and braid her long hair—only yesterday morning how I had rejoiced in the anticipation of this last hour with my darling! Her beauty was to shine forth on this day with supernatural lustre, I had carefully tried on each article of her dress, that nothing might be lacking. Alas! how terribly hard the smallest service was now! My fingers trembled so that they could scarcely fasten the veil on the coronet of braids. She let me do as I chose, rose, sat down, bent her head on one side or forward, just as she was requested. How entirely was fulfilled, my presentiment, that Valérian would not lead his bride to the altar, since he had seen her in her wreath and veil.

My old head is confused, I no longer remember the circumstances clearly—I think I accompanied Irene to the hall—"How beautiful she is, but how deadly pale!" I fancied I heard the gentlemen whisper. She walked past the guests without any greeting, and the ladies said:

“How haughty she has grown, she already feels herself a countess !”

When the count approached, she trembled as if with some sudden chill, the pupils of her eyes dilated, and the fixed stare with which she gazed at the spot where yesterday a small blood stain had been visible, expressed unutterable, horror. He did not seem to notice it, but taking her hand, which he gallantly kissed, paid her a few compliments upon her beauty. The road to the church was dangerous to traverse; the torrents of rain that had fallen the night before had softened the ground and washed deep holes. The ruinous old church with its age-blackened pictures of the saints, the faded ribbons swaying mournfully on the walls, the broken dirty candles, made an even more cheerless impression upon me than usual, it was as cold and gloomy as if nothing was ever said there except masses for the dead. Father Spiridon's attention was wholly occupied by the distinguished bridegroom, he addressed himself principally to him, and therefore did not notice that the bride made no response to the question : whether she would be the faithful wife of this her choosen husband ?

In the bustle and confusion that followed the wedding, I succeeded in executing Valérian's last request ; I had found on my table the letter he wrote just before his death, and instantly locked it up. While Irene was sleeping, I had hastily broken the seal and a second letter fell out, addressed to the good old landowner, Ivan

Ivanovitsh Gribinoff, the only person who had not yesterday and to-day loaded the master of the house and the count with compliments and congratulations. To me he had only scrawled the words : "In case of my death, I beg you to give the enclosed letter to Gribinoff." I was forced to act cautiously, for Stepan Petrovitsch must notice nothing, lest his hatred and suspicion should be attracted towards the old man. The latter was standing somewhat apart from the rest of the company, who were crowded around the tables. I placed a bottle and a few small glasses on a waiter and went to several of the older gentleman, offering them the strong liquor. Thus I at last reached Gribinoff.

"Try this naliffka," I said aloud, "you must convince yourself, that I am a good Russian housekeeper. While he was drinking, I added a low in tone: "I have a letter from Valérian Maximitsch for you in my pocket."

"Poor fellow, he is perhaps already dead," He replied in the same tone, "my servant told me last night, that a duel had been fought in the billiard room, and Valérian Maximitsch had been severely wounded and carried to Malinovka. His coachman and servant were strictly charged to make no outcry, but such a thing couldn't be kept entirely secret."

"You are mistaken, he was already dead when they placed him in the carriage, a corpse arrived at Malinovka."

“Dead ! ” The old man’s kindly face lost every tinge of color.

“God allows many crimes to happen,” he murmured, “I was very fond of the young man, though he rarely came to my house—I knew his mother, you are aware—”

“You are the only person whom he trusted, that is why he made you executor of his will.”

“So young, so young,” he whispered, shaking his head mournfully, “of course I’ll do what he asks, the words of the dead are sacred.”

I hastily thrust the letter into his pocket, first glancing cautiously around to see that no suspicious eyes were watching us.

“God bless you, Ivan Ivanovitsch, you alone have a heart to feel for my darling’s misery.”

“Poor child,” he sighed compassionately, “and she is only at the beginning of her trials, what a consolation it must be, that you are with her, Pauline Carlovna.”

He pressed my hand and I turned away, for my composure threatened to desert me, and I dared not weep among these people, my tears were too bitter and burning.

The count’s travelling carriage was standing in the courtyard ; I received orders to dress the young countess for the journey. I had had a charming costume made for her, a cloak of blue silk trimmed with swansdown ; it was very becoming, the lovely face peeped out of the white border of the hood as if from the calix of a flower.

Let me pass over what followed, in silence. How shall I describe how the gentle dove became the prey of the fierce vulture? The count, wrapped in his cloak of black fox fur, was already waiting for us at the door. Stepan Petrovitsch wished to appear a tender father at parting. "The time will soon come when you will thank me, Irinaschka, children usually misunderstand their parents' good intentions." According to the custom of the country, he was about to give his daughter his blessing. This shameless baseness exasperated me. I drew Irene away, exclaiming: "Spare yourself this blasphemy, your account is large enough to secure you a place in hell without it."

He made a wry face and uttered a suppressed oath—this is the last recollection I have of him. I never saw him again and never shall see him, for he died a few months ago of apoplexy, the natural result of his excesses. No one mourned him, neither his so-called friends, his servants, nor his daughter, who heard the news of his death without the quiver of an eyelash, without uttering a word. A few neighbors, to whom the estate had long been heavily mortgaged, divided it between them—I wouldn't own it, if the soil contained gold mines.

Just as night was closing in, we reached the estate the count had recently purchased. I had been separated from my darling; she rode with His Excellency in the first carriage, I went in the second. Never shall I forget the imploring glance she fixed upon me, when she per-

ceived that she was to be alone with her husband. Her fingers clutched my hand, the rigid features assumed an expression of wild despair.

“Let Madame Laurent go, Irene,” said the count authoritatively, putting his arm around her.

At the touch she sank down like a strangled bird, her fingers relaxed their hold, and she allowed him to draw her away without resistance.

During the next few days and the whole period of our journey I scarcely saw her, a maid performed the services I had rendered; the utmost I could do was to approach the carriage when we stopped at the post stations and the count had alighted, and whisper a few words. I often doubted whether she recognized and heard me; wrapped in furs, she lay motionless in one corner with a pale face and closed eyes. Only when the count came and in his harsh voice, which he vainly strove to soften, persuaded her to drink some hot tea or strong wine, she mechanically sat up and obeyed him. Yet she scarcely sipped a few drops, and I know not on what she lived during the ten days—except her agony, her suppressed tears, the blood of her mortally wounded heart. Once, when I stood beside the carriage door covering her cold hand with tender kisses, stroking her cheeks, and calling her by all the pet names I had given her when a child, the count seized my arm.

“You have not forgotten our bargain?” he asked, gazing fixedly at me with his piercing eyes.

“No,” I answered in a suppressed tone.

“Not a word of what you saw to Irene, or I’ll send you so far away, that you cannot reach her even in dreams. I hope the court life will have a favorable influence upon my wife, balls and entertainments will efface the memory of that sentimental boy, I shall at last hold in my arms a living woman, instead of a marble image, a corpse. Make her understand, that she must learn to love me—I’m not accustomed to sue long, her obstinacy might at last arouse my anger and then—”

I shuddered—I was to be his intercessor!

On reaching St. Petersburg a magnificent palace, with endless suites of apartments, received us; an army of liveried servants awaited the commands of their dreaded master. Irene gazed at all the splendor with weary, careless eyes. Modistes came to take her measure for superb toilettes, which she was to wear upon her presentation at court, her entrance into society. One of these busy, garrulous ladies was a Frenchwoman and an artist in her department. Haughty princesses, who looked down upon their inferiors as worthless dust, eagerly strove to win her favor, loaded her with attentions and flatteries, humbled themselves before her—all in order to be the first to obtain a new fashion, for the sake of a dress, whose elegance would fill others with envy.

When Madame Tissol discovered that I was a countryman—we even came from the same province, Franche-

Comté—she became very cordial to me and often, after she had sent away her assistants with boxes of silks and laces, remained half an hour in my room. From her I learned many things, for she had access everywhere, and the most aristocratic ladies confided to her the secrets and gossip of the fashionable world.

“*Eh bien,*” she said to me one day, about three weeks after our arrival at the palace, “*et votre dame la jeune comtesse*, are her cheeks always so pale? She is lovely as an angel, the most beautiful woman who has ever appeared in St. Petersburg, but silent and lifeless as a departed spirit. I have just tried on a *manteau de cour*, it is superb, no lady except the empress possesses one like it, the count ordered me to use the best and costliest material, and I acted accordingly, the embroidery in relief of gold threads is exquisite—do you suppose the countess even smiled, or said: ‘*Madame Tissol, mais vous etes artiste?*’ And another dress, *drap d’argent*, with an overskirt of malines lace caught up here and there with sprays of roses, a marvel of lightness and elegance! I thought that might be more to her taste—but no! She patiently submits to all the fitting and trying—for you must know I am very particular in these things, the trying on of a toilette is of vast importance, when the whole is completed it can’t be altered, for this reason I always come in person *pour essayer les robes*, although it costs me a great deal of time at these distances and in the horrible condition of the streets—*madame la comtesse*

had no eyes even for the rose buds. Can what people whisper be true? *A vrai dire*, the count hasn't many friends, he is hated for his brutality and arrogance, the really aristocratic families—there are some, though very few—wouldn't have given him a daughter. It is said he carried off his beautiful young wife, after having killed her lover; others assert he bought her from him, and that is why the countess has forgotten how to smile. Such things do happen here, it's a terrible country even apart from the climate, which is *execrable*; nine months winter and three months summer. As soon as I have accumulated a tolerable property, I shall return to *la belle France*. Tell me, *chere amie*, you must be best informed in regard to these matters, did that monster really obtain possession of the poor angel by force?"

I could say nothing, Irene was now the Countess W., what would it avail to expose her misery to the curious, to whom it would only afford welcome material for gossip?

"You are mistaken, *chere madame*," I answered quietly, "it would be false, if I were to assert that the countess consented to this marriage very joyfully, that you will understand, since he is fifty-six, she only seventeen, but there are no particularly romantic circumstances connected with it; she yielded to her father's will. Parents have the power of deciding such alliances. She is now suffering from homesickness; reared in the solitude of the country she cares little for luxury and splen-

dor, she will gradually accommodate herself to the change of circumstances, and then the roses will again bloom on her cheeks."

What would I have given, if my words had been true !

Madame Tissol was clever enough to pretend she believed me.

"*Voyez ces mauvaises langues !*" she answered with apparent indignation, "to spread such malicious stories ! I can understand, that the young countess stands somewhat in awe of her stern husband—it's very natural, with the great difference in their ages ! In his youth he is said to have been by no means bad looking, a Hercules in uniform, the empress had a weakness for him, he wasn't a reigning favorite, but a favorite nevertheless. Besides, he would be a monster if he wasn't fond of his charming young wife—a highly educated young lady, she does you great credit, her manners are remarkably fine, few ladies can compare with her. I prophesy that she will soon be the spoiled child of society, all the men will be in love with her, and the women wont be jealous, because she has so little vanity."

My locquacious countrywoman embraced me and drove to another of her illustrious customers.

During the first few months I feared Irene's mind was affected, I could find no other explanation of her dull apathy, her total indifference to everything. She moved as mechanically as an automaton, answered if

directly addressed, but it evidently cost her an effort. Valérian's name never crossed her lips, she never spoke of the home she had left, where she had passed her childhood, her thoughts, as far as she expressed them in words, never dwelt upon the past, the day of Valérian's death seemed to be a grave-stone that covered it; and so it has continued up to the day on which I write these lines. Now and then towards evening, when she is alone and not obliged to receive or pay a visit, she comes to my room, brings a low stool, places it at my feet, lays her head in my lap, and remains so for hours; when she rises, she utters a deep, heavy sigh, such as can only come from the depth of a sorely wounded heart, gazes timidly into the dark corners, and goes away without having relieved herself by any words. How can the gentle, loving, yielding creature have become so utterly transformed? She, whose devout nature often filled me with emotion, cherishes an unconquerable aversion, one might almost call it hatred, towards the church and its rites. She no longer prays to the madonna, whose image, framed in a gold shrine set with jewels, stands in her bedroom; she avoids attending mass; when Easter, the greatest church festival in the country, was celebrated, during which even mortal enemies forget their hostility for a time and all exchange friendly greetings, she said she was ill and remained in bed. She has managed to procure the skeptical writings of Voltaire and reads them with feverish interest, then exclaims triumphantly:

“Here it is incontestably proved, that there is no personal God to whom we can pray ; the world is a piece of mechanism, governed by fixed, immutable laws, which concern the individual human being no more than the leaf on the tree.”

Madame Tissol was not mistaken in regard to Irene's success in society. The empress received her with unusual favor, kissed her, and gazing at the lovely, innocent face, said to her husband in a tone, which the bystanders asserted, was very significant :

“Count, you have an angel, I hope you will never forget what an undeserved piece of good fortune has fallen to your lot.”

The sovereign's example was followed by every one. Wherever Irene appeared, her beauty, her girlish grace, excited universal admiration ; yet the gentlemen vainly endeavored to draw the young countess into vivacious, sprightly conversation, they obtained only monosyllabic replies. They called her *la belle statue*, and each secretly hoped he might succeed in animating the marble.

The admiration Irene excited at first increased the count's love for her—if one can apply the word to a feeling blended with so much that was base, sensual, and evil. The striking beauty of the innocent creature had undoubtedly charmed his jaded senses, and he had probably said to himself, that such a woman would never betray the honor of her aged husband and expose him to mockery ; but what specially pleased him was the thought

of robbing the young bridegroom of his bride on the eve of the marriage, and thus compelling fate to obey his caprice. When, however, he gradually came convinced, that the horror which had weighed upon the unhappy girl from the moment that he appeared before her, stained with her lover's blood, did not yield to the magic of luxury and pleasure, a feeling of angry impatience took possession of him. Months after she had been installed in his splendid palace, she fled at the sound of his heavy step through the stately chambers, until she reached the protecting asylum of my room. How often she came rushing in with a look of mortal terror, clung to me almost fainting, and pressed her hand upon her heart, which beat in quick, irregular throbs. If his imperious voice reached her ears, she obeyed the call, but her limbs trembled violently, her head dropped on her breast—she silently submitted to her fate.

Several times, contrary to my own feelings, I tried to persuade her to be reconciled to her lot, to find an endurable side to it, because I feared that the unconquerable dread with which the count inspired her, might have bad results. If his patience was exhausted he would vent his cruelty and brutality upon her, and lead her a life compared to which her present one would be a Paradise. She listened to my loving representations in silence, and shaking her head gravely, answered gently:

“It is beyond my control, as soon as I see him a pale shadow rises, pointing to his death-wound and

groaning : “ ‘ He murdered me ! ’ Oh, if you knew what I suffer ! ”

She covered her face with her hands, and I hoped a flood of tears would afford relief—but her eyes remained dry.

I had anticipated a beneficial influence from the first cry, the first smile of her child ; women who had fallen victims to despair had been again reconciled to life by such a little helpless creature. I perceived with quiet pleasure, that a faint flush returned to Irene’s cheek, her voice became less hollow, her movements more animated, a mysterious something seemed to have touched her with its magic wand. A few words, which escaped her one evening after she had sat silently at my feet for a long time, told me that my supposition was incorrect.

“ Do you know, *ma bonne*,” she began, raising her eyes to me with an almost joyful expression, “ I think I shall die, as my mother did when I was born—if she had loved me, she would have taken me with her into the grave. I too shall not love my child, I cannot, so I shall leave it behind, and you will nurse and rear it, you will be a real mother to it. Promise to supply my place. How alluring death seems, how it smiles upon me ! ”

And as the tears ran down my old face, she embraced me affectionately, as she had not done for a long time, I too had become an object of indifference to her.

“ Don’t cry, *ma bonne*, I am not ungrateful and forgetful of my duty, I’m only unutterably miserable.”

The count was very pleasantly surprised by the news the physician, the famous Doctor Soumis, told him. He confidently expected to have a son, an heir of his name, that was what he had impatiently desired. He therefore became uncommonly gracious, ordered the servants to be flogged less frequently, and no longer imposed such severe punishments upon the soldiers; the staff officers on whom he often vented his anger, uttered a sigh of relief, because their service was somewhat lighter—a sun-beam actually seemed to rest on the stone palace. A famous artist—at least he was so considered by the fashionable world—received a commission to paint the Countess W.'s portrait. He was deeply touched by the beauty of his subject, suspected that some secret grief was consuming the young heart, and with subtle appreciation placed in her hand a white rose, which a worm was gnawing. No words passed between them, for Irene was cold and reserved towards all, even those who meant kindly, but when the portrait was finished and the wonderful likeness excited universal surprise, she held out her slender fingers for him to kiss and smiling mournfully, said :

“The rose shall be carved in marble on my gravestone, it embodies the story of my life.”

One morning, just before her confinement, a servant came to me with the message, that a gentleman, a stranger wished to speak to me. I was surprised, I had no acquaintances in the city, who would seek me out, and

awaited the visitor, whom I received in my own room, with a certain feeling of curiosity. It was Gribinoff! I lost all composure as I gazed at him, his presence vividly recalled the past. After a few moments I recovered my self-control and had sufficient forethought to bolt the door, that chance might not bring Irene to the spot. The worthy old man wiped his eyes.

“Pardon me, Pauline Carlovna,” he began, “I am still bewildered by the magnificence which greeted me here at every step. The porter would scarcely admit me in my simple schuba, besides I came in a hired carriage, and he who visits this palace sits wrapped in sable in his own equipage. The broad marble staircase with its gilded balustrade! One actually feels reluctant to step on it in heavy boots. As I followed the footman through the apartments, which seemed endless, I thought to myself: Yet Irene Stepanovna would a thousand times rather be at Malinovka, her little feet would glide more joyfully over the clay floor of a hut, than the mosaic of this palace—Poor Valérian Maximitsch! There was loud weeping and wailing in the village, when he was lifted out of the carriage—he had been a kind, indulgent master. The house was adorned with green garlands; the rooms had been fitted up with all the beautiful things he had ordered from Moscow, the young wife only needed to enter—and a corpse was brought back!”

“Don’t speak of it, Ivan Ivanovitsch, my heart is ready to break.”

"I must speak of it, my dear lady, I took the long journey for that very reason. I would far rather say nothing about such sorrowful things."

"I thank you for your sympathy," I answered sobbing, "you see how old I am, but I have not yet learned to control my feelings."

"Give your tears free course, it will do you good."

"What do they say about the event in the neighborhood?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"One says this thing, another that, there's not much ado made when there is no large family to raise an outcry, and Valérian Maximitsch had no relatives. It was whispered that the duel was a half murder, but people don't like to say hard words about a distinguished man, his arm reaches a long distance and can speedily stop the mouth of any careless babbler. Stepan Petrovitsch, on the contrary, is bitterly reviled, he is said to have sold his daughter for twenty thousand roubles. Where there is no accuser, there is no judge. The story is almost forgotten, at the utmost only mentioned by the women, who are envious because Irene Stepanovna is clad in velvet and ermine."

"She would change places with the poorest peasant in Malinovka," I sighed.

"I believe it," he answered simply, "and that brings me to the object of my visit. You remember the letter

Valérian Maximitsch wrote, and which you gave me yourself?"

I nodded.

"Its contents are important to the countess, I have the paper with me, shall I read it aloud to you?"

I made a gesture of refusal.

"Not his own words, I cannot hear them, they would move me too deeply. Tell me what it contains."

"As you please. It is not much, only the most necessary directions, for the poor boy's time was short. He wrote that it was his express desire, to bequeath the estate of Malinovka with everything appertaining to it, to his beloved bride, Irene Stepanovna; he was firmly convinced that he had not another hour to live, and in the presence of death the mind is blessed with peculiar clearness and an almost prophetic vision. He foresaw that the man who now thirsted for his blood, in order to appropriate his treasure, would soon weary of her, perhaps even illtreat and abandon her. Then Irene must have a refuge where she would be surrounded by memories of a happier past, then she must be able to fly to Malinovka, to his own and his mother's grave. But as he feared that she might be robbed of this legacy by her father, who would claim it as his property and basely squander it, he named me executor of the will. I was to manage the estate in the name of the absent heiress and keep everything unaltered, until the real owner took possession; for this purpose he added a power of attorney, which

gave one a legal right to take charge of the property. I faithfully fulfilled the dead man's directions; I drove over to Malinovka and informed the people that their dead barin* had given me the charge of the estate, exhorted them to do their duty, and consulted with the intendant, who has already faithfully served Valérian's mother and who promised me to act as if his master's eyes were always upon him. As Malinovka is forty versts from my village, I can go over several times a year, to see that nothing is neglected. I have long been anxious to tell you this news, which I dared not communicate in writing, lest the letter should be lost or fall into the wrong hands, so I was obliged to wait until my business would allow me to take a long journey. That is the reason you have not heard from me before."

Good, faithful old man, so there were people who felt and acted warmly and justly. Valérian's presentiment might perhaps be speedily fulfilled, what a comfort was the thought, that Irene need not wander homeless about the world, that she had an asylum where she could end her sorrowful life in peace. If any cure was possible for her sick heart, it was to be found in Malinovka, and if she did not recover, her death there would at least be a happy one.

I discussed many things with Gribinoff, and he gave me some papers, which proved my darling's title to Valérian's legacy.

*Master.

“I am old and may be summoned by God any day,” he said, “I must prepare for this event, that the countess may sustain no injury from it.”

He asked me if I would take him to her! No, it would be better for him to return, leaving her in ignorance of his presence, in her condition the emotion which the sight of him could not fail to produce, would be extremely dangerous. So he departed, without having seen her.

Irene’s hour came—a little girl saw the light.

“A daughter!” the count angrily exclaimed, “if it had been a son who had kept the whole house in an uproar, but a senseless girl!”

He scarcely looked at the tiny creature and said: “it need not have taken the trouble to come into the world, it looked like an ugly little ape.”

The mother also turned away.

“It looks like him, it is his flesh and blood,” she murmured, when I showed her the little creature, “take it away.”

Poor child, orphaned from its very birth! True, the nurse and baby took possession of the magnificent apartment, which had been furnished for the expected heir, but with the exception of myself, no one asked for them; the screams of the shrill little voice sounded in the lofty, spacious room, like the whining of a dog. Irene slowly recovered, after a few months she could once more put on her superb dresses and jewels, and people thought her

if possible even more beautiful than before, but she remained silent, torpid, indifferent as ever.

Since his daughter's birth the count's manner towards his wife has undergone a change, the physicians told him that he could not expect other children, and, his heart was set on having a son, a lawful heir. Irene's unvarying melancholy is oppressive and burdensome to him ; if his vanity was formerly flattered by the universal admiration she excited, he now seems to grudge her the homage, which throws him into the shade, it vexes him to be constantly forced to hear, that he must consider himself fortunate to possess such a beautiful wife. The habits of his camp life break out again, he is often very much intoxicated, and in this condition it is wise to keep away from him. A short time ago he beat the butler so violently with the heavy handle of his riding whip, that the poor man was carried out of the room half senseless. His anger is also vented on Irene, though not in such rude outbreaks—he has never raised his hand against her—but in sneering, scornful words.

“ Why did I marry this pale face ? ” he exclaimed furiously yesterday, when he happened to dine at home and no guests were present, “ she hasn't even sense enough to give me a son. To think that a girl, a foolish creature, who isn't even capable of transmitting my name, must be my sole heiress ! ”

With these words he dashed his clenched fist violently

on the table and cast an evil look at his beautiful, pale wife.

Madame Tissol, who always pays me a visit whenever she brings the countess a new dress, told me that very unpleasant stories were in circulation about his Excellency ; it is said that he has formed an intimacy with a person very well known in the city, whose house is frequented by the most dissolute men. On the other hand there is a rumor that he is trying, with almost youthful ardor, to win the favor of one of the empress's maids of honor, a tall, stately blonde, with a fresh complexion, who has a firm, resolute character, and has hitherto refused to accept his attentions. These are dark prospects ! Can Valerian have foreseen the future ? Must my darling drain this cup too ? Oh ! they will make her bitterly atone for being a burden in the house, into which she was dragged by force.

The servants are devotedly attached to the kind, gentle mistress, who never utters a harsh word, every petitioner is sure of a hearing, and so far as she is able, she averts the count's anger from the culprits. To be sure, she has little power, the household is managed, by an intendant, who is responsible only to his master.

A short time ago the count engaged a secretary, to attend to his business correspondence, a young German, born in St. Petersburg, who has a very winning manner. His position is not an enviable one. His Excellency is capricious and whimsical, what he orders

to-day he revokes to-morrow, and his subordinates are held responsible for the misunderstandings that arise; but the salary is large, and the young German—I think his name is Emile—poor. He has a pleasant face, the dreamy expression of his features sometimes reminds me of Valérian, whose fair, curling hair he also has. He cherishes a devout reverence for Irene, sees in her a saint, an angel—an ideal, as the enthusiastic Germans say. A highly educated man—how sad it is, that poverty compels him to serve such a master! It is a pleasure to converse with him, he possesses a great deal of information and is interested in things that occur outside of Russia.

He recently brought me news of events in Paris, of Robespierre's reign of terror, and the degeneration of the revolution so gloriously begun. *Ma pauvre patrie!* Streams of blood deluge its soil and those are right, who fly in terror from the unchained fury of the people. But who is to blame, that they are intoxicated to madness by the first draught of freedom! Only those who would not quench their burning thirst by a single drop of the precious cordial! Throngs of emigrants have even turned their faces here; Monsieur Emile tells me, that they live in the old frivolous way, as if they had not looked into the terrible face of Nemesis. People wonder that dukes and marquises try to earn their bread by giving lessons and other pursuits—I can see no great merit in it, the alternative would be simply to fold their

hands in their laps and starve to death, for no one wishes to receive alms—but nobody marvels that there is no room in their heads for one grave, serious thought. When they return to France, they will begin just where they stopped.

When will the time come, that the enslaved people of this country will become conscious of their human dignity? Then those broad, proud rivers, the Volga and Dnieper, will be dyed with blood and bear corpses to the sea, for the more oppressive the servitude the more terrible is the rebellion. Mousieur Emile's views are the same as mine, but he is cautious in expressing them; every outrage is permitted here, but no one can speak freely. He sometimes takes tea with me, when the count and Irene have gone out. It happened accidentally the first time he came to ask for the bills of Madame Tissol and the other modistes, which the intendant wanted to pay. I gave them to him and explained various items, that no mistakes might occur. The servant had just brought in the samovar* and as the room was warm, I invited him to stay, if he had nothing better to do. The nurse and Tania were also present, and I took the child on my lap to give her some milk; she is now a year old and very sensible for her age.

Monsieur Emile, like all good men, is fond of children, he played with her and she laughed merrily.

“She has a genuine Russian face,” said he, “there

* Tea-urn—Tr.

is not a trace of her mother's beauty; with her short nose and high cheekbones, she can never be pretty."

"I hope she will remain ugly," I answered sighing, "beauty is usually a misfortune to women."

He pressed his hand across his brow—just as Valérian used to do.

"Pardon me, Madame Laurent," said he, "and don't ascribe my question to curiosity or indiscretion, it is inspired by the warmest interest—is it not true that the countess is very unhappy in her marriage?"

"You are committing no indiscretion," I answered bitterly, "you would be deaf and blind if you did not understand her position."

"How I pity the beautiful young wife!" he exclaimed in a sorrowful tone, "did she tell you about the scene that occurred this morning?"

I shook my head, it was not her custom to speak of painful incidents, when any had happened I knew it only because she was even paler and more quiet than usual, and sat motionless in one spot gazing into vacancy.

"His Excellency had ordered me to bring some letters he expected to him at once, and I went with them to the countess's rooms, where he was. The maid had summoned me, it is true, but I did not venture to go any farther uninvited. As the doors were closed only by portières, I was forced, against my will, to hear a conversation in the next room. It really could hardly be called a conversation, for the countess did not defend

herself, even by a word, and silently endured the torrent of unjust reproaches poured upon her. Perhaps it was because I imagined the shrinking figure of the delicate, lovely woman, but the count's expressions seemed uncommonly coarse and brutal; he shouted furiously that he must have been out of his senses to have thought her waxen face beautiful, she was a lifeless, stupid doll, who did not understand how to behave as befitted a Countess W. If her beggarly father had even left a few peasants' huts, he would send her at once to the country, where she belonged. She alone stood in the way of his happiness, if it were not for her, he might make a suitable match any day and marry a woman, who would have sense enough to give him a son.—Why should I repeat the insults he uttered? My blood boiled, I could scarcely refrain from rushing in, seizing the worthless wretch by the throat, and thundering: “Kneel down and implore this angelic creature's pardon.”

I was startled. Were matters so bad already—if the count said such things in his rage, he would soon find ways and means to execute his evil designs. There was no one to defend Irene and her poor little daughter, no one except myself, the helpless old governess. As according to the laws of the Greek church, a divorce is not allowed, he could make a second marriage only in case of his wife's death. A chill ran through my frame—oh! God, would he murder her like Valérian? No, no, he might cast her off, I would conceal her so closely

that no one should have a suspicion of the Countess W.'s existence. What new troubles were in store for us? Too many gloomy pictures thronged upon me, I was unable to give the young man, who was our sincere friend, an immediate answer.

"I wanted to tell you one thing more, Madame Laurent," he continued eagerly, "rely upon my devotion. For the countess I will joyfully sacrifice the last drop of blood, risk a conflict with any one to protect her. I only remain in this position, which is unendurable to a man with any feeling of honor, because I fancy my feeble aid may some day be useful to her—"

His agitation choked his words—noble youth! Irene, without suspecting it, has won a most faithful friend. How delicately and timidly he expressed his love—he asked nothing except to be permitted to die for her. I showed him the casket with its touching picture, and related how I had chanced to find it; he listened with breathless eagerness to my story, though I chose my words very cautiously, he could guess the truth.

"Her heart is dead," he said after a pause in a tone of deep emotion, "it will never wake again."

TWO MONTHS LATER.

Monsieur Emile now comes to my room tolerably often, he always finds some excuse for visiting the old governess ; sometimes he brings me a newspaper, sometimes he has a little toy for Tania, who recognizes a friend in him and laughing merrily totters towards him on her weak little legs. Often he whispers a word of warning, we both daily expect some violent measure on the part of the count. The latter has spread abroad a rumor that Irene's mind is affected, and does not find it difficult to obtain credence for his assertion ; people suddenly remember that they have noticed many eccentricities in her manner, which can be explained by an aberration of the mind. For weeks he has not allowed her to go into society, all invitations are declined "because the countess is ill." Although these diabolical intrigues alarm me, it fills me with joy to see that the dull, gloomy oppression seems to be passing away in a slight, very slight degree, from Irene's soul. She rarely sees the count, and this may be balm to her sick heart. The change is still so imperceptible, that only my eyes detect it. We are much together ; she gladly leaves the cold, stately apartments

for my modest room ; only one thing grieves me : she scarcely attempts to conceal her aversion to her child, as soon as she enters, she begs me to send the nurse and little Tania away. On the other hand, it is not disagreeable to her to meet Monsieur Emile ; I have told her what a faithful friend he is, and a short time ago she even thanked him. She likes to hear him talk, his voice falls pleasantly upon her ear, and though she rarely, almost never, takes part in the conversation, her eyes rest with a gleam of interest on his bright, animated face.

“ I should like to know, whether she too discovers in him a faint resemblance to Valérian ? I might almost think so, for when her eyes rest upon him a long time, they gradually assume the gentle, dreamy expression formerly habitual to them. If it were not for the danger hovering over our heads, a peril the more alarming because we cannot see it distinctly, but merely suspect it, this time might be called a happy, peaceful one. There is an appearance of comfort, when we are together in the evening. I busied at the round table in making tea, Monsieur Emile helping me as cleverly as a daughter, Irene sitting in a low arm chair, her graceful head thrown slightly back, her dark melancholy eyes half closed, holding in her slender hands a piece of embroidery, to which she scarcely adds a stitch. I perceive that she feels sheltered and at ease, and the hope arises that infinite love and care may succeed in raising this crushed flower. Strict censors might perhaps blame me for favoring the

young man's secret love, in a certain sense making opportunities for him to see Irene, for I need only close my door against him to cut off his intercourse with the countess—but I say with the Jesuits: the end sanctifies the means. His presence exerts a beneficial influence upon Irene, the sympathy which attracts youth to youth exists between them. Not that I suppose she can ever return his love—no, I consider that impossible, she has lost the power to do so—but the tender, ardent feeling he cherishes for her surrounds her with the warmth of a sunbeam. I think we are never so done with life, so dead to every thing, that we are not glad to be loved by the good. An enthusiastic youth, like him, who is more at home in the ideal than the practical world, asks nothing except to be permitted to kneel at his mistress's feet; I must confess I wonder at his modest, reserved manner, the perfect control he exerts over his feelings.

During the last few days scruples have arisen, I begin to reproach myself for conduct dictated solely out of regard for Irene's welfare. Monsieur Emile seems to suffer, his face is no longer so fresh and youthful, his mouth twitches nervously, often in the midst of conversation, he relapses into silence and gazes gloomily into vacancy. This must not continue! Yesterday, before Irene came, I drew him aside and said:

“I am an old woman, *mon ami*, and therefore take it upon myself to give advice when it is not asked. I fear you have entered upon a conflict, which is beyond

your strength, the waves of passion, of a hopeless passion, threaten to close over you, unless you have courage to save yourself from sinking. Fly while there is time, avoid the presence of her whose image fills your soul—I see that no man can long endure to adore as a saint, at a respectful distance, the woman he loves. You will now carry away no cureless wound—Irene will doubtless miss you, for except myself you are the only person whose society she values.”

He had thrown himself into a chair and covered his eyes with his hands.

“No cureless wound?” he repeated in a hollow tone. “Oh! Madame Laurent, have not you, who are so clever and sharp sighted, long since perceived that my whole life is concentrated in the few hours, during which I sun myself in the light of her eyes? I envy the pillows on which she leans her head, the stool on which she puts her little foot,” he knelt and reverently kissed the wooden stool, “when she enters, the walls expand, a golden radiance floods the room, it seems as if I were transported into Heaven! I am well aware that my love is hopeless and will never be returned, but the very pain it causes affords me a mournful happiness, it is dear because in it I possess a part of her, which will always remain mine—Have you ever loved, Madame Laurent?”

A strange question! As if I had been born with wrinkles and grey hair! I was really somewhat embarrassed, that the impetuous youth in his agitation forgot

all discretion, I even blushed a little ; to regain my composure, I took a pinch of snuff and then answered with dignity :

“Of course, Monsieur Emile, I too have had my little romance in my youth, I have shed tears, believed I could never be happy again—just like you.”

“How is a comparison possible !” he vehemently exclaimed, “you may have had a little passing fancy, but you cannot have known a real passion, or you would not so coolly propose to me to banish myself—out of caution ! It is the incomprehensible, mysterious nature of this divine feeling, to victoriously overthrow all the barriers reason opposes. If death itself were to be the direct consequence of the kiss that unites two loving souls—I would mock at it, for what is annihilation to the one moment that contains the highest bliss of love ?”

Then, as I probably looked very much puzzled—I had never expected such a passionate outburst of feeling from the gentle, quiet young man—he seized my hand beseechingly ; like a child, who when threatened with punishment hastily stifles its sobs, he by a strong effort repressed his emotion.

“Forget the foolish words I have uttered, Madame Laurent,” he said imploringly, “I cannot deny that I love her, but I swear never to repeat the assertion again. I will be silent, only don’t send me away, let me be near you, gaze at her angel face, hear her sweet voice. I want nothing except to be her most faithful servant, I know

what a gulf divides me from the aristocratic lady, the Countess W."

At this moment Irene entered and interrupted the young man's words; he understood how to control himself—the poor, who are obliged to struggle through life, learn this difficult art early. As he bowed and respectfully waited for her to address him, no one would have supposed that every nerve in his body was trembling.

I was much less calm, the pleasure of our peaceful intercourse was destroyed; I involuntarily made more noise than was necessary in arranging the cups and spoons, my hands could not hold any thing firmly, and Irene, who is very sensitive and nervous, was annoyed.

"You seem tired, *ma bonne*" she said kindly, "I was wrong not to have relieved you of this trouble long ago, let me make the tea."

She pushed me gently aside and took my place before the samovar. How gracefully her slender hands moved, and how becoming was the warm flush which the hot tea-urn brought to her cheeks. The nurse was still in the room with little Tania, and as she had often noticed that her mistress's brow clouded when she saw the little one, had retired with the child into a corner behind the large, projecting stove. But the table with its glittering array of dishes was much too attractive, for Tania to remain patiently in the dark corner, besides she saw her friend, Monsieur Emile, who usually had some toy for her in his pocket. Raising her little voice she crowed

and shouted, just as children spoiled by love are in the habit of doing. The little creature fortunately did not yet suspect, that her lisped words would be heard by no fond mother. I rose to quiet her, for I dreaded the cold, careless expression Irene's face always assumes when she sees the child. To my joyful surprise, the aversion was less evident, it seemed as if she imposed a certain constraint upon herself in the stranger's presence, or else the feelings of a mother stirred within her, in short she turned and smiling faintly said :

“Bring Tania here, *ma bonne*, you are never happy unless you can pet and wait upon a child.”

I returned to my seat almost timidly and endeavored to quiet the little one, who strove to grasp at everything. As she perceived Monsieur Emile on the other side of the table she tried to get to him, and Irene, who sat between him and me, placed her on her lap a moment, that she might give the young man her little hand.

If a stranger had entered the room, he would have thought he beheld the happiest family group. Alas, it was impossible for my darling ever to find peace under this roof, misery crouched on the threshold, the mere sound of a voice was enough to remind her that she was the most wretched woman on earth. And the anxiety inspired by Irene's defenceless situation was blended with fear for the young man, whom we called our only friend. I perceived how tenderly his eyes rested upon the countess, as soon as he thought himself unobserved, how his

hand trembled when he received from her the cups she had touched, how he blushed when her dress chanced to brush him—no! It must go no farther! I distrust the power of self-sacrifice possessed by youth; some day the strength of his feelings will conquer him, he will utter his passion in words, and then the intercourse so dear to me and himself will end in a harsh discord. That she will respond to his affection seems to me impossible! Perhaps, after the lapse of years, when she has gradually become accustomed to him and learned to see in him a brother, an unselfish protector, she will, not love him as he does her, but place her poor broken life under his protection—yet for that she must be free, not bound to this brutal tyrant, who is weary of her and says angrily, that it's often easier to obtain a wife by force, than to get rid of her.

Oh! God, how will this end? These frivolous, pleasure loving people, who at first showed Irene a certain degree of kindness, principally on account of her rare beauty, have short memories, they have already forgotten her. Her illness and the count's command keep her aloof from the circle which, at first, noisily admired her; her husband now and then lets fall an allusion to his wife's disordered mind—thus the interest she at first excited is gradually dying out. In addition to this is the peculiar dread of maniacs most people cherish, and no one doubts Irene's insanity, all now remember her constant melancholy, her want of animation, the fixed expression of her

eyes—of course she is mad! It would not surprise me if she were! In the middle of the night I am often seized with a terrible fear, that the count may have her dragged to a madhouse, where the poor victims are subjected to barbarous, cruel treatment, that makes them what others say they are. I have heard so much of the horrors of these institutions, that the idea of seeing Irene's tender frame exposed to illtreatment makes the blood freeze in my veins. If I could fly with her to Malinovka, to save her from her impending fate! Perhaps this plan might be executed, if Monsieur Emile gave his aid—but no, it would be selfish, ignoble to accept it, his whole future might be destroyed. The count would take a terrible revenge, crush the young man, deprive him of all means of support, and what would become of them? He is poor and has an aged mother to support, as he told me a short time ago. We must not apply to him, though he is the only person who can communicate with the outside world, who by the sale of some jewels can obtain money to procure a pass, without which it is useless to think of traveling in this country.

TWO YEARS LATER.

Malinovka, in the autumn of 1795.

“Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace!” exclaimed, I believe, a good old man, whose story is related in the New Testament, and I echo the words from my inmost soul. That my feeble body does not yet refuse to serve me, that these eyes, half blinded by tears, can still see, these ears still hear, is incomprehensible to me. The cause of this miracle is the knowledge, that there is a helpless little creature, to whom for the present my withered hand is a firm support, and who thinks she is protected from every discomfort, every danger, when she hides her curly head in the folds of my dress. I mean the little three-year-old Tania, Tatiana Gregorievna, as the servants now call her, the future mistress of Malinovka. For her I will complete these recollections, which contain her mother’s story; perhaps at some future time she will put a cross under my name, and add: Died at such and such a time.

It is hard for me to collect and arrange my thoughts, in order to write them down, and besides they must re-

turn to that palace in St. Petersburg, which I could fain forget. Gradually I recall each incident. The scene I last described was repeated many times. The count no longer seemed to trouble himself about his beautiful pale wife, he was usually away from home, and did not return even to his meals. Visits from ladies had entirely ceased, as it was universally reported that Countess W. was insane; gentlemen were ushered directly into the count's private room. If Irene had not had me, she would have been entirely alone. At my entreaty she resolved to go out in a sleigh, during the clear, bright weather; I hoped the fresh air would strengthen her feeble health. The nurse, child, and I myself accompanied her, and these drives with the spirited horses, which dashed forward like the wind, afforded us all much pleasure. We went along the superb granite quays, past the magnificent palaces, to the island, always over a dazzling carpet of snow, over which the sleigh dashed with arrow-like speed.

But even this trifling change in the dull monotony of Irene's existence was denied her. When the count heard of these excursions, he became furiously angry, forbade the intendant to obey any such orders from the countess, and loaded her and me with a torrent of coarse, abusive words. In spite of his high rank, he was as rough and untutored as a Cossack. He probably feared that his statements about his wife might be doubted, if she were seen driving so quietly and happily with her little daughter. When he spoke to her, his eyes flashed with a spiteful,

angry glare, like that of a beast of prey lying in wait for its victim—it was a horrible glance.

Madame Tissol, the modiste came to see me, not to produce magnificent toilettes from numerous bandboxes—as the countess no longer went into society, she did not need them—the good lady came simply from curiosity. I ought not to blame her for it, she saw in human beings only two classes, those who were customers and those who were not, and she inquired into their affairs only when they furnished material for gossip.

“And this poor countess, so young and so pretty, is shereally—the “significant gesture with which she pointed to her head completed the sentence.

“No more than you and I,” I answered indignantly, “I don’t know who takes malicious pleasure in spreading this false report.”

“I perfectly understand that you feel offended by it—*mais que voulez vous?* Its a misfortune that may befall anyone. I suspected something of the kind, when the countess remained so indifferent to the most elegant dresses, a lady who doesn’t appreciate a *manteau de cour* can’t be quite right in her mind. Then her severe illness at her daughter’s birth, *lait s’est pore a la tete*, it often happens when people are young and delicate. Her Majesty the Empress inquired very sympathizingly about her a short time ago.”

Of what avail was my denial? People are unwilling to change an opinion, because the acknowledgement that

they have been deceived is a confession of a lack of sharp-sightedness. Madame Tissol also told me, that the count was madly in love with the tall, blonde maid of honor, he made a perfect fool of himself, and the young men laughed at him unmercifully. The lady was extremely haughty and repellant, which seemed to increase his passion.

“If insanity could be used as a ground for divorce, he would certainly get rid of his wife to marry this proud beauty. *Chacun selon son gout*, I couldn't admire her, she has no refinement, her appearance is far too robust and masculine.

I did not see my countrywoman again, either she remained away of her own accord, or the porter was ordered not to admit her.

Irene was a prisoner in the palace, of whose endless suites of apartment, she at last occupied only her chamber and my room. The servants, who soon perceived that she was deserted, found it more profitable to remain in the good graces of their stern master, and therefore daily neglected their mistress more and more, we could scarcely get the most necessary services performed. Yes, the life we led in the superb palace was a strangely cheerless one. Monsieur Emile was the only person who showed us the same attention, but his was an honest, thoroughly noble nature. And how boldly and enthusiastically he talked, when the conversation turned upon the new modes of thought which were agitating the world. How eagerly

he defended the rights of the oppressed, the enslaved! He was our regular evening guest, if owing to business engagements his arrival was delayed, Irene looked at the clock and greeted the expected visitor with a friendly smile. I secretly admired his self-control, the passionate outburst, which had startled me, seemed forever quieted, but his face betrayed his silent suffering.

Our situation was one of unnatural suspense, I can only compare it to that of a condemned criminal, whose execution has been deferred, and who each morning on waking says to himself: 'Will it take place to day?' The weeks that elapsed in this way seemed like months, years, a feverish restlessness took possession of me. Irene was far more composed than I. 'What can happen worse than the suffering we have already subdued?' she asked, fixing her large dark eyes sadly upon me.

While I racked my old brains for some expedient, which might offer a cheering prospect, it suddenly occurred to me to appeal for protection to the empress. Many things were said of her, but it was asserted that she had a really generous heart, though her acts, especially in her old age, were often influenced by a petty egotism which even bordered upon cruelty. I would write to her and truthfully describe Irene's situation; if disposed to take her part, she would know what to do. Monsieur Emile approved of this plan, the difficulty was how to get the letter into the hands of the empress, as I could

trust none of the servants; he helped me out of this embarrassment, by saying he would attend to that part of the matter himself. He had often been sent to the government offices on business for the count, he knew many of the employes, and hoped to induce one of them to hand the petition to the empress. I therefore composed it, I no longer remember the precise words, I only know that I tried to describe the state of affairs as quietly as possible. Other people rarely sympathize with our outbursts of passion, that which moves the inmost depths of our souls leaves an unprejudiced person cool and calm, our vehemence is often distasteful, while we are unable to accuse them of heartlessness. Facts alone arouse sympathy, not the way we consider them. I placed the letter in the hands of Emile, who anticipated the best success; the secretary of the bureau of petitions, a refined, intelligent man, who had always treated him with marked cordiality, and whose duty it was to give the empress each day a report of the petitions which had arrived, had promised to give the letter to the sovereign at once, recommending it to her special attention. Monsieur Emile had a frank, honorable nature, he still believed in men and felt no distrust of them, until they had given open proofs of baseness.

I cannot describe the suspense, the alternations of hope and fear, in which we spent the following days; I tried to accustom myself to the thought of failure, if the count succeeded in blinding the empress's judgment by

Innuendoes, she would see in Irene's words—I had written in her name—only the fancies of a lunatic, whom she at the utmost pitied, but could not aid. If this sole hope of deliverance failed, we had no resource except flight—how it was to be accomplished, God alone knew; not the smallest obstacle was little Tania, whom I was firmly resolved to take with us—what would become of the little creature, whom the unnatural father would abandon?

So, on the evening of the third day, we three allies sat at the round table, Monsieur Emile discussing the possible decision of the empress, whose reply we might expect hourly after the following morning; he told us that the count was more impatient than ever, he seemed determined to make his position unendurable, to humiliate him in every way, true the staff officers were also obliged to submit to his whims, but he was the special victim. Irene turned towards him with a sad smile:

“You ought not to take up my cause so warmly, Monsieur, I belong to those who bring their friends misfortune, the few who loved me have suffered bitterly. Leave me to my fate, which is inevitable, I shall always remember you with gratitude.”

“Can you really believe, Countess, that I would be so selfish and cowardly? What value would life have for me, if I should be banished from your presence? I would not have mentioned these pitiful annoyances, except to illustrate the count's present mood. Don't grudge me the happiness of being permitted to risk my life for you.”

He bent forward and gazed at her with an expression of indescribable tenderness; a faint flush suffused her face, she perhaps suspected the feeling hidden in the depths of his soul. Her long lashes drooped shyly, and with half averted face she extended her hand, which he passionately kissed.

Just at that moment the door was violently thrown open—the count, his features distorted with rage, stood on the threshold, in his hand he held a torn letter, which he waved menacingly in the air—I guessed all! The secretary had broken his promise, it was more important to him to secure the favor of the powerful general, than to become the protector of the oppressed. The smile with which the intruder scanned us, as we sat rigid and motionless was a fiendish one.

“So,” he said hoarsely, striving to control his passion, “so plans are being made, intrigues woven against me in my own house? Who wrote this letter? I will have an answer!” he thundered.

I rose—he should not find me cowardly, as all was lost, I need not choose my words.

“I,” I answered stepping forward, “and even your brazen effrontery will not venture to accuse me of saying what is false. Do you want to commit another murder? Beware, the walls of your palace are thick, but we are not in the interior of the country, where you might commit a crime unpunished, but in the capital which has a thousand ears. Try to lay hands upon Irene, and

tr-morrow the birds on the house tops will tell the story."

"Crazy old witch!" he muttered furiously, "it becomes you to utter such words, you who aid this shameless woman to meet her lover. Speak!," he shouted to Irene, "it doesn't surprise me that you have forgotten how to blush, since you have humiliated yourself so far as to stoop to a servant, a slave, whom I can lash, kick out of doors." Raising his clenched hand he advanced towards her. She had shrunk back against the wall and stood there trembling violently, with both hands pressed upon her temples. The young man sprang forward to protect her with his own person,

"Not a step farther," he impetuously exclaimed, his slender figure developed a steel-like strength, for he held as if in a vice the arm of the herculean count, who vainly struggled to release himself. "If you address a single insulting word to this noblest and purest of women, I'll fell you to the ground!"

The count foamed with rage and struggled with the young man, who called to me to remove Irene, to save her from the fury of this monster, little Tania began to cry piteously, the nurse shrieked—it was a repulsive, horrible scene. The noise attracted several servants who at their master's command rushed to his assistance. By superior strength Emile was thrown to the floor and securely bound.

"Away with him to the courtyard," gasped the

count, "and order the coachmen to lash him till their arms are lame; he attacked me. Afterwards let him be given to the police, I have discovered that he is in connection with revolutionists. In the Siberian mines you will have plenty of time to nourish your dreams of freedom," he continued scornfully, turning to the unfortunate youth, who lay on the floor tied up like a bundle, yet in this torturing situation he thought only of obtaining one glimpse of Irene. Life returned to her rigid limbs, she rushed to the count, and, clasping her hands imploringly, exclaimed in a tone of heart-rending agony:

"Have mercy, he has committed no crime, except to pity me! Not this cruel, disgraceful punishment, which will kill him. His ghost will haunt me, if his blood flows for my sake."

Her beautiful face expressed the most terrible despair, she had thrown herself upon her knees, in her agony she humbled herself before her hated tormentor.

"I suppose you are afraid your lover's face will be disfigured? It's as smooth as that of the first, to whom you vowed to be eternally faithful. Well the faith didn't last long."

She shrieked like a mortally wounded animal, but instead of weakly fainting, drew herself proudly up to her full height, her black eyes blazed in her pale face like sparks of fire—the over-strained bow had broken, the gentle, patient creature was suddenly transformed into an avenging angel.

“You, you dare to conjure up the bloody shade of him you murdered!” she cried with such wild energy, that he involuntarily trembled. “Then may his ghost forever wander through these rooms and drive from them the last remnants of joy and peace, may it stand at night beside your bed, stare at you with its glassy eyes, and torture you with terrible dreams. May the curse of your act rest upon whoever crosses this threshold, may nothing thrive here save discord, shame, and misery!”

The count was superstitious, like all Russians, even the most aristocratic, and such a curse might be expected to exert a mysterious, malevolent influence; his bronzed face lost every tinge of color, the servants crossed themselves and shrank timidly back.

“She is mad!” said their master in an unsteady voice, “why do you stand there listening to her senseless words? Go and take him with you!”

The tension of Irene’s nerves relaxed, she uttered a cry of agony as the young man was dragged away, and fell fainting in my arms. The count, with a sinister glance, silently left the room, whose door he locked, to shut us off from all communication with the outside world.

Irene’s consciousness returned, but it was a sorrowful awakening; she sobbed on my neck and declared she could hear the unhappy man’s shrieks of pain. Owing too the situation of the room, this was impossible; her excited mind conjured up these fancies. How bitterly

I reproached myself for plunging our young friend into this misery, he could not help us, and must now meet a terrible future. The count's accusation, false and unfounded as it was, would be enough to condemn him to the harshest punishment. Connected with revolutionists! These words would condemn him unheard. And what was to become of us? I secreted some jewels of Irene's about my person, that we might not be wholly without means.

Long before morning dawned, some one knocked at our door, and the intendant, a serf and subservient tool of his master, entered; casting a timid glance at the countess, he drew me aside to tell me that we must prepare for a journey. Irene, the nurse, child, and myself were to leave the house at the end of an hour, the necessary baggage was already packed—he had also supplied furs and wraps, that we might not suffer from the cold.

The latter measure had certainly not been ordered by the count, but was probably inspired by a remnant of devotion to the gentle mistress.

"Leave this house!" exclaimed Irene in an almost exultant tone, "hurry *ma bonne*, wherever we may be sent, I shall breathe more freely than here."

She dressed with the utmost haste, I could scarcely persuade her to drink some warm tea, which was absolutely necessary, as the weather was bitterly cold. At the end of an hour the intendant appeared, to conduct us down stairs. When we had arrived two years be-

fore, the travelling carriage had driven under the wide portal, a countless train of servants stood respectfully on each side of the flight of stairs, and the count led his beautiful young wife triumphantly through the ranks. On this dark morning—it was not yet seven o'clock—we glided like criminals down a back staircase to a side door, before which waited the vasock, a covered sledge, that somewhat resembled a coffin. One after another we crept through the little door; besides the coachman, an old servant accompanied us, who seemed to have the charge of defraying the expenses of the journey, for the intendant gave him a sum of money and repeated certain orders. It was a long time before we left the great city; through the little window in the back of the sledge we saw how gloomy and deserted the streets still appeared, here and there a sleepy porter opened the door of a house, or a coachman, holding a stable lantern, crossed a courtyard. Gradually the houses became smaller, meaner, and scattered at longer distances from each other, large fenced gardens divided them, then immense plains sparsely dotted with trees appeared, and St. Petersburg, which we were never again to enter, lay behind us. We found ourselves on the highway leading to Moscow, a road that extends hundreds of miles in unvarying monotony, now winding through marshy lowlands, now passing for miles through forests of pines. Huge masses of snow filled hollows and ditches, often towered like walls on each side of the road, and rested on the

branches, which sometimes broke under the weight with a loud crash. After travelling many hours, we reached a small town, a miserable village, half buried in the snow; we stopped at the inn, and while the horses were changed, were permitted to enter the waiting-room, the intense heat of which fairly stupefied me after the severe cold. We drank several cups of hot tea, which slightly unthawed our benumbed limbs, and then crept back into the vasock, where we sat nestling closely to each other to protect ourselves as much as possible from the piercing cold. It was in the month of January, the thermometer stood at twenty-eight degrees below zero, no wraps or furs could resist the cold; our breath filled the narrow space with vapor, which formed a hoar frost on the sides. During the first few days, we suffered comparatively little from these hardships. Irene seemed to revive as the distance from St. Petersburg increased; although my thoughts were constantly occupied with the unfortunate Monsieur Emile, who like us was probably journeying towards his place of banishment, but with the difference that he was forced to endure the terrible weather insufficiently clad and in an open Kibitka *—I avoided mentioning his name, which always brought a flood of tears from my darling's eyes. The thought that we had been the cause of his sad fate oppressed us like a crime. We did not even know what had become of him, we could merely imagine. The servant had told us,

*Travelling carriage used to transport criminals to Siberia.

that the disgraceful punishment had really been inflicted, and though the coachman dealt powerful blows, he did not utter a single outcry, but bleeding and half senseless, was conveyed to prison—this was all we could learn from the silent Vassili. According to his instructions, he at first avoided speaking to us and did not lose sight of us during the short time occupied in changing the horses, that we might have no communication with the outside world. But by degrees the laconic roughness softened, it did not come from his heart. Russian serfs—I am a good judge, for I have lived among them thirty years—are wonderfully kind-hearted, full of pity for the helpless and suffering and for children. Vassili proved the truth of this opinion. At first it was little Tania, who in her nurse's lap was comparatively comfortable, with whom he made friends, he pitied her because she could not sleep in her little bed and had no doll; then he inquired sympathizingly about Irene Stepanovna's health, and asked if he could do any thing for her.

When we spent the nights in the wretched dirty inns, he tried to make them a comfortable bed of cushions, wraps, and straw, ran to procure milk and white bread, stopped up with moss the chinks and holes in the vasock, through which the wind whistled, and faithfully did everything in his power to relieve our suffering. But he was unable to shorten the terrible length of the journey, whose fatigues threatened to exhaust Irene's feeble strength. A cough tortured her day and night, robbing

her of rest, her head burned and ached, she complained of nausea, and rejected with loathing the uninviting food Vassili procured for us from the peasants.

Yielding to my urgent questions about the goal of the journey, the servant acknowledged that he was ordered to convey us to an estate owned by the count in the province of Orenburg, a letter which he was to give to the intendant there, contained further particulars. To Orenburg ! My heart stopped beating—that meant to cross the whole extent of the vast empire from west to east. We should be at least five or six weeks on the way, for granting that we found fresh horses at every station, we could only go a short distance each day ; in the terrible condition of the roads in the desolate eastern provinces, the danger that threatened us from wolves and robbers, it would have been madness not to seek the shelter of a house at the approach of twilight.

“What is to be done?” I said in silent despair, “your mistress is ill, the child too looks pale and delicate, if this goes on several weeks, you will have two corpses to carry. Can you answer to God for such a sin?”

He twisted his fur cap in embarrassment.

“What can I do, Pauline Carlovna?” he answered, looking anxiously at Irene’s pale face ; “You know the barin,* he will be obeyed, he would find me in the farthest corner of the country, if I didn’t carry out his orders.”

I urged him no further, I was sure he would soon be more accessible to my entreaties and representations, Irene's gentle endurance of suffering must soften him, large tears had run down on his frozen beard when he carried her from the sledge to the house, because she was too weak to walk. "She grows lighter every day, I notice it," he whispered.

And the cold, the horrible cold! The death-like stillness of the white fields of snow, the desolation and cheerlessness, the unspeakable melancholy, that spread its dark wings over every object. Mournful was the aspect of the black pine forests; mournful the moaning of the wind, the croaking of the ravens, the distant howling of the hungry wolves; mournful were the dilapidated wooden huts, the stupid faces of the peasants; mournful was the song that interrupted the profound stillness, when we met a long train of merchandise, consisting of hundreds of carts one close behind another, while the mujiks, clad in sheepskin, walked singing beside them.

Irene's weakness increased to an alarming extent; when we were two or three days journey from Moscow, she felt so ill, that she begged us not to carry her to the vasock, whose jolting, swaying motion almost made her poor head burst.

I beckoned to Vassili, to leave the room with me.

"You see now," I said to him, "your mistress has only a short time to live, don't let her perish miserably on the highway, give her a peaceful death. We must

remain for the present in Moscow, to get a physician for Irene Stepanovna; it shall do you no injury to yield. You have neither wife nor children, no ties of any kind, I'll promise to provide for you better than the count ever will. You shall go with us to the estate your mistress owns, she will give you your freedom and a large piece of land, you shall want for nothing."

"But when my master learns that we have not reached Orenburg, he'll hunt for me from one end of the country to the other, and—woe betide me if he catches me."

"You needn't be anxious about that, a great deal of water will flow down the Volga before he receives a letter from there. And do you suppose he'll trouble himself much about us. A snow-storm has buried them, or some other accident has happened, he will think. He would be glad to have these suppositions come true, he won't inquire about us if we remain in the closest seclusion."

I talked to him a long time, and after repeatedly assuring him that no news of our abode would ever reach the count, he at last consented.

My plan was to write from Moscow to Gribinoff, and beg him to take us to Malinovka as soon as Irene had partially recovered. The thought of ending her days in the lonely manor, hallowed by memories of Valérian and his mother, exerted a wonderful influence upon her; the expiring spark of life flamed up anew, she urged us eagerly onward, that she might sooner reach "home," as she called the secluded village.

We reached Moscow towards evening, but did not venture to enter the city, whose better class of inns offered people of wealth at least a tolerably comfortable abode. In spite of the great distance, a frequent intercourse existed between the old and new capital of the empire, how easily the countess might happen to meet persons, who had known her in St. Petersburg, hers was not a face that it was easy to forget. To avoid such a possible encounter, we preferred to remain in the miserable suburbs, which no aristocratic foot ever entered.

Vassili, who was experienced and cautious, examined under various pretexts the uninviting inns, where carters, peasants, small landowners, and petty officials lodged. One on Tula street looked more comfortable than the others; the host, with his snow-white beard floating over his breast, even had a venerable appearance, and his wife's round face beamed with good nature. We afterwards learned that they belonged to the Staroverz * sect, and the old man was honored as a priest and apostle by those of the same faith, they were excellent people, whose kind hearts inspired them with a tact and delicacy I have rarely found in higher stations. I had instructed Vassili to say that Irene was my daughter, who had come to Moscow to await the result of a lawsuit.

At first there seemed to be difficulties in the way of our reception; the silver-haired host came to the vasock with bared head, and regretted he had no rooms fit for

* An ancient Russian faith.

ladies, we should not be comfortable enough with him. His wife also came out and eyed the travellers curiously, casting a significant glance at her husband, when I urged that it would be very difficult to proceed farther, as my daughter was weak and ill, and the child also needed rest. Little Tania's piteous crying supported my entreaties. The husband and wife consulted together, and the hostess then said she would give us her own room, which was thoroughly heated, for the night, and the next day see what could be done. The sledge turned into the courtyard, and the worthy couple helped us alight, the wife took Tania in her arms, the old man carried Irene upstairs. The room was low but large, the chinks in the board partitions carefully stuffed with moss; chairs, tables, and bed spotlessly neat. For the first time in twelve days Irene could stretch herself out comfortably, she was so exhausted that she fell asleep while I was undressing her.

For three months we remained in the little wooden house, whose occupants after a few days, became as dear to us as if they had been our nearest relatives. Nothing was said about our seeking other quarters, the kind old couple placed everything they possessed at our disposal; to induce us to prolong our stay. I had sent Vassili to Gribinoff with a letter in which I related our sorrowful story and begged him to come and take us to Malinovka. According to my calculations the messenger would reach our faithful friend in ten or twelve days; our limited

means did not allow him to travel fast ; besides that would have attracted attention, he would have been asked for his pass, his master's name ; he therefore went like the serfs on foot, now and then taking advantage of the opportunity to ride on some cart, which was going the same way.

In the small room, with these simple people, Irene first learned what it is to be surrounded by unwearying love and tender care. Soon after our arrival, I had wished to obtain a doctor, as my darling's health did not seem to improve ; she grew visibly thinner ; the obstinate dry cough made me anxious, I feared the development of a disease similar to that which had killed her mother. But how was I to procure conscientious and skilled medical aid ? True, there were several famous foreign doctors in Moscow, but I dared not apply to them, because as their practice was exclusively among the aristocracy, Irene's presence would have been betrayed. The usual Russian quacks I knew by experience ; it required the tough constitutions of the peasants to resist their barbarous treatment, a few dozen leeches, repeated bleeding, Spanish flies as large as a plate—these were their sole remedies, which they used without the least discrimination.

Our host dissuaded me from sending for a physician, he had his own, I must say, very sensible views about the nature of the disease.

“The young lady's difficulty is here,” he said pointing

to his breast, "and *that* no doctor, only God can cure. To procure some alleviation of suffering is all man can do, and I know of an herb tea, which has already benefitted many."

He looked at me with such clear, honest eyes, that I placed implicit confidence in him. After taking the drink for a time, Irene felt decidedly better. The old man always prepared it with his own hands and brought it to the invalid himself, at the foot of the stairs he exchanged his boots for soft shoes, that the steps might not creak under his tread, he opened the door cautiously, it was marvellous to see how noiselessly the strong man moved.

Week after week elapsed, the end of February was approaching, and we had heard nothing from Gribinoff; I did not know how to explain his silence, the thought that Vassili might have met with some accident never occurred to me. At last a letter came, informing me of the servants arrival. The poor fellow had nearly lost his life on the way, a snow-storm had overtaken him, and he would have perished if chance had not brought a peasant to the spot; who lifted the half frozen man on his sledge and carried him to his hut, where he lay a long time unconscious. When he recovered his strength, he resumed his journey and succeeded in reaching Gribinoff. Our friend also wrote, that he thought it advisable for us to remain in our hiding place until spring, as a journey in winter might seriously endanger Irene's health.

As soon as the roads became passable, he would come for us. The proposal was a sensible one; I had been anxiously wondering how my darling would endure the fatigue. Marfa Carpovna shed tears of joy at the news that she was to keep us under her roof some time longer, hugged and kissed little Tania, and ran into the kitchen to bake her nicest golden brown pirogg.*

The white-haired old man had gradually become Irene's dearest friend, whose society she preferred to mine. I did not feel offended, and willingly left her alone with him; they often had long and earnest conversations, which principally concerned the things of the other world. He resembled a patriarch, and his faith was as firm and immovable as that of the men of God. He was wonderfully familiar with the Scriptures. In the evening I heard him reading the bible in a low tone to the invalid, at intervals answering the objections she made, and teaching her from the treasures of his rich experience of life. What my devoted love, my sensible representations had not succeeded in accomplishing, this simple old man effected: he comforted the crushed soul, lightened the heavy weight that oppressed her heart, and led her back to the faith of her childhood. With him she talked of the past and freely revealed her soul, whose darkness he illumined with the mild light of consolation; her eyes sparkled when he entered the room, she joyfully extended her emaciated little hands, and called him father.

If this transformation was incomprehensible to me—at my age people don't change their opinions—I honored it as a miracle; the way Irene sought peace was a matter of indifference to me—if she only found it.

One morning in spring, when the snow had melted and the hills around Moscow were covered with a tender green vegetation, Gribinoff drove up to the little house. The sight of Irene moved him deeply, he had not expected to find her so altered and fragile, she was the mere shadow of the beautiful, blooming girl he had known. The parting from our host and hostess cost many tears, Marfa Carpovna would not let Tania leave her arms, and repeatedly put her head into the carriage to give her another kiss, Irene clasped both the old man's hands: "You have saved my soul, father," she whispered, clinging fondly to him. He blessed her and expressed the hope, that she would bloom into new life with the flowers. Turning to me, he added in a low tone: "She will bloom and pass away with them; bear submissively what God decrees."

His words were only too true—I did not deceive myself in regard to her health.

Malinovka! The lonely manor standing on a gentle acclivity among the trees; in the village women and children ran to the doors, to stare at the rare apparition of a travelling carriage. They recognized old Gribinoff, who sometimes came to see how matters were going, and shouted a cheerful "God be with you, father." But who

was the pale sick lady, who had thrown back her veil, and was gazing dreamily into the distance.

Before the house stood the servants, who had been informed of our arrival, among them Petra, Valérian's valet, who had carried his master's corpse back to Malinovka. All kissed the hands of Irene and little Tania, and moved silently aside to admit us. The aged housekeeper, who had served Valérian's mother, said respectfully as she opened the doors of the rooms: "Everything has been left just as the young master ordered it to be arranged, he told us himself where to put the furniture, which arrived from Moscow a few days before—before the wedding—" sobs choked her voice.

Irene lingered a moment on the threshold of the drawing room, which had been prepared for its mistress with such loving care, sighing heavily, she pressed both hand upon her heart, then closed the door behind her—she wished to be alone. At the end of an hour she called me; the peaceful, resigned expression of her features was unaltered, in her gentle manner she told me that she wished to occupy these two rooms, where every object spoke to her of Valérian's love, Tania and I were to take the adjoining ones in order to be near her. During the beautiful, equable summer, Irene's disease seemed to make no progress, she was strong enough to walk every evening to the two graves, in which Valérian and his mother slept. No one was permitted to accompany her except Petra, the former valet, who was obliged

to relate over and over again what lamentations arose in the village, when the young master's death became known, and how the servants had carried him to his last resting place.

I had never believed it possible, that a Russian household could be managed so quietly and smoothly, without loud scolding or threats of punishment, but I had proof of it before my eyes. The servants were admirably trained, and now animated with special zeal ; for the sake of their sick mistress all did their duty conscientiously, and he who could anticipate one of her wishes was proud to fulfil it. When I went to her bedside in the morning, and she held out her hand to me, I felt each new day bestowed as a precious gift—I always feared she might fall gently and quietly asleep, without my knowledge.

Towards autumn her weakness perceptibly increased, her mind often wandered for hours and she did not recognize those who surrounded her, at such times, when little Tania was playing at her feet, she often asked who that strange child was ?

I will say little of her death. It was on a warm sunny afternoon ; before receiving the sacrament, which was given her by a priest who came from Gribinoff's village, she said after a short struggle, in a low, but distinct voice :

“I forgive all, who have injured me.”

The servants knelt in the next room, weeping and sobbing, the child's gay laughter rang out at intervals ; I

wanted to take her away, but Irene, by a gesture, forbade it. Her bed was placed, so that she could gaze through the windows at the setting sun and the trees, already gay with the hues of autumn; at her request I had removed the baptismal cross she wore around her neck, and placed it in her hand. She fixed her eyes upon it, and as I bent over her to catch her words, murmured:

“I know and feel, *ma bonne*, that there is a divine justice, a gracious, loving God, who guides us to our eternal salvation. Promise me to rear Tania in the faith, that has freed her mother’s heart from all anger and bitterness—she will soon be alone in the world, and need an unwavering support, which will out last time.”

Half an hour after she drew her last breath We buried her beside Valérian.

Tania and I are left alone; the little one does not yet feel that she is a poor orphan, I am all the world to her, and for her sake I ought not to long for death. She is three years old, and I have asked Gribinoff, who, in case of my death, can supply my place to her? This faithful friend will write to a relative living in Moscow, a childless widow, and ask whether she would be willing to come here and assist me. Then, if I die, a substitute will at least be provided.

MALINOVKA, IN THE AUTUMN OF 1802.

Death forgets me, he prefers to pluck fragrant flowers rather than dry, withered leaves. Now it is Tania's hand, that supports me, she leads me to the arm-chair, arranges my pillows, pushes a stool under my feet, wraps me in warm shawls, and the joyful eagerness with which she renders these little services, really beautifies her by no means pretty face. A good, sensible child, in whom the instincts of the housekeeper are already stirring, plain and insignificant in her external appearance as well as in her intellectual gifts. She has, thank Heaven, one of those commonplace natures, that enjoy the advantage of being spared any unusual fate. I think she will never marry but end her days in Malinovka, she seems just suited for an old maid.

Besides, how should she make the acquaintance of a man? We have no neighbors and see no one except Gribinoff, who lives as quietly as ourselves. A few days ago, for the first time, a stranger crossed our threshold—a stranger! For my feeble eyes did not recognize him till he mentioned his name: it was Monsieur Emile, who had returned from Siberia. The Emperor Alexander, on his accession to the throne, granted an amnesty, and thereby opened the doors of freedom to thousands of unfortunates. The fair-haired youth had become a grave man with fur-

rowed brow and an expression of deep bitterness around the compressed lips. He had been to St. Petersburg, to see his old mother, of whom he had heard no tidings during all the long years—for criminals condemned to the mines are not permitted to receive letters. She had exchanged her little house for the churchyard, the lodging which sooner or later all occupy, whether they have lived in palaces or huts.

The loving remembrance of Irene had not been effaced by all the suffering she had innocently brought upon him. His first efforts had therefore been directed towards obtaining information of her. It was not difficult to get news of Count W.; he heard that the powerful general had become a helpless, paralyzed old man, trembling before the look and voice of his haughty, cold-hearted wife, who from the first days of her marriage had ruled him with despotic power. It was said that she impatiently awaited his death, and made no secret of the aversion inspired by the man whom she had wedded solely for his wealth; with the refinement of cruelty, she daily told him that she was the avenger of his first wife, the gentle, angel-like creature, whom he had driven to madness and an early death.

No one could give any information of Irene, except that she had been put in a sledge with the old governess and the child and sent away; as she had not reached the estate in Orenburg and nothing was heard from the servant who accompanied her, it was supposed that she had

died on the way in a snow storm or by some other accident.

Monsieur Emile—I call him so from habit—was not satisfied with this vague news, he remembered Gribinoff and resolved to apply to him, some presentiment whispered that Irene might have fled to this tried old friend. So he had come to find even here only a grave, but it consoled him to hear how peacefully and submissively she had met death.

He left us after a few days; he wished to make up for the nine years he had lost, I think he intended to go into business with a companion in suffering, who, like him, had been imprisoned in the Siberian mines for a pretended crime. I wished him good fortune from my inmost heart. May happiness at last smile upon him!

CONCLUSION

ADDED BY TATIANA GREGORIEVNA.

Malinovka, 1812.

To-day, my twentieth birthday, my guardian, Ivan Ivanovitsch Gribinoff, gave me these papers. They contained a sad story, which strengthened me more and more in the determination never to leave my lonely Malinovka for the wicked world. Here every one loves me; when I take my evening walk in the village, the children run joyously to meet me, young and old respectfully greet "the good mistress."

Ma bonne, my mother's faithful nurse and mine also, fell gently asleep two years ago. Her mind retained its clearness until she drew her last breath, and I think I learned more in the hours I sat on a stool beside her arm-chair and she talked to me, than from the governesses, who gave me regular instruction.

Soon after her death Ivan Ivanovitsch Gribinoff learned that Count W. my father—I can hardly utter the word—was dead. As my guardian, he thought it his duty to assert my claims to the property; the papers attesting my birth were sent to the widow, whose avarice induced her to refuse to acknowledge them. She would

rather run the risk of a law suit, she wrote, which, it is true, would heap still more disgrace on the count's memory but this was a matter of entire indifference to her. Gribinoff was so enraged by this cynicism, that he determined to defend my rights in a court of law, but I entreated him not to recall the horrible story, the name of my dear, unhappy mother was too sacred to me to drag it before a public tribunal, and the count was my father, though he had never performed a father's duties. I needed no wealth, the value of Malinovka had increased under my economical management, I had more money than I wanted. There was but one thing I earnestly desired to possess : my mother's portrait, which *ma bonne* had told me was such a wonderful likeness. My guardian again applied to the widow, and this time with more success ; she sent not only the desired picture, but also my father's, from which she doubtless did not find it hard to part. I hung them on the right and left of the mantel-piece before which I spend my evenings with my companion and the housekeeper. After my death, they, as well as all my property, shall go to my step-brothers and sisters, who, though I do not know them, are my only relatives.

Since I myself have suffered from injustice, I will act with strict impartiality.

* * *

These were the papers my friend, the old lady's nephew, had given me to read. The gentle Irene doubt-

less a thousand times recalled the curse uttered in a moment of despair, but misfortune has hitherto pursued Count W.'s descendants. At any rate I resolved not to leave my friend long in a house so full of sorrowful memories. Before I fell asleep, I made all sorts of plans forgetting him away from this solitude and bringing him, apparently by chance into the society of a charming girl, who cherished a deep affection for him, and whose sunny smiles could not fail to drive away the fits of melancholy, that at times attack him.

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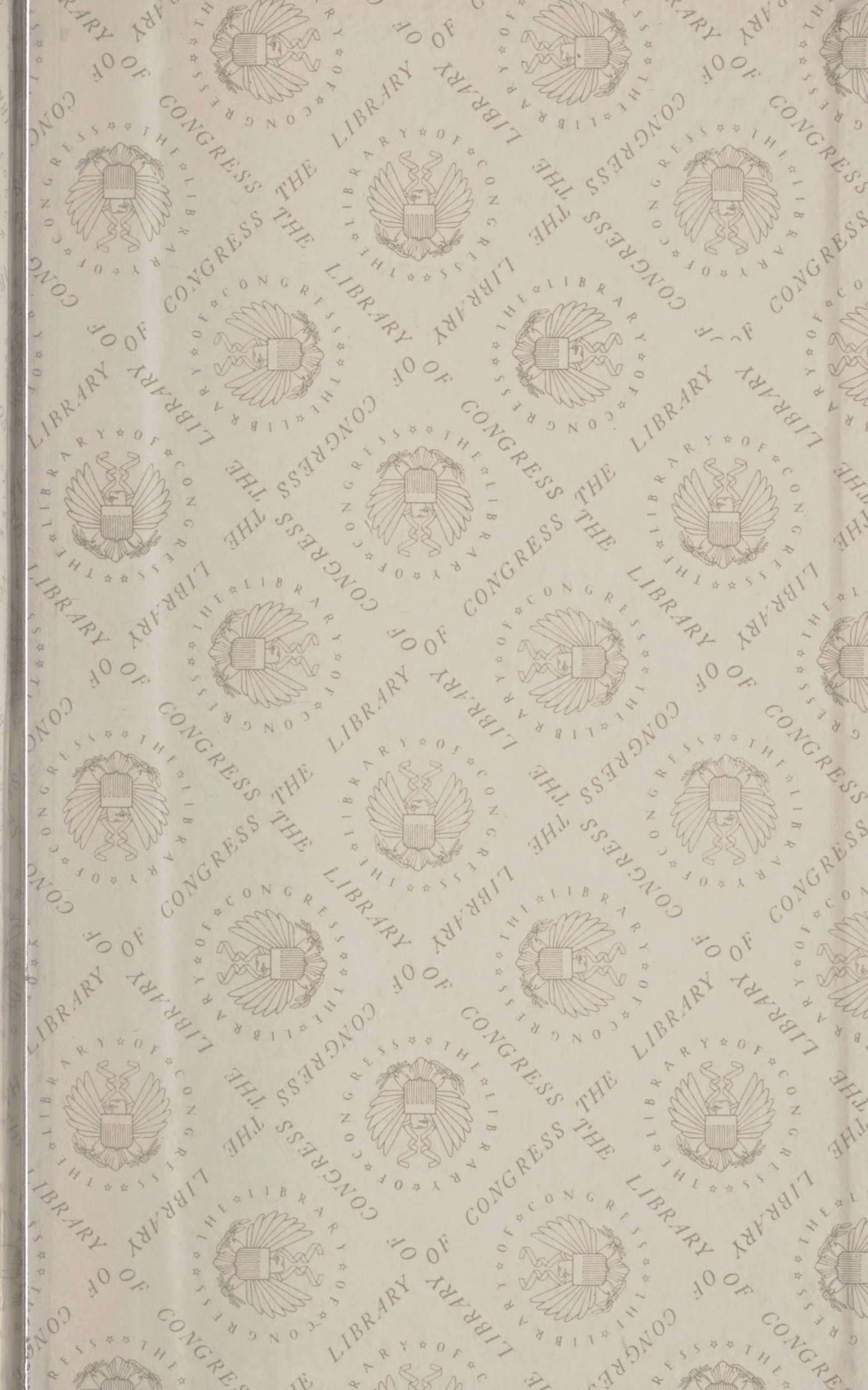
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